

NEW
SERIES

OCTOBER

VOL.
35

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YEAR TO YEAR."

All the Year Round

a
Weekly Journal

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1884.

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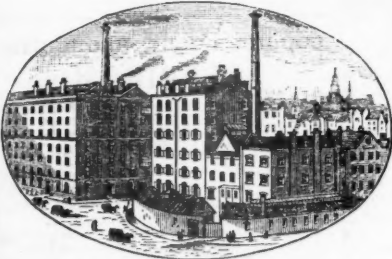
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Thy beauty is to me.

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I loved her for that she was beautiful;
And that to me she seemed to be all nature,
And all varieties of things in one:
Would set at night in clouds, and rise
All light and laughter in the morning; fear
No petty customs nor appearances;
But think what others only dreamed about;
And say what others did but think; and do
What others would but say; and glory in
What others dared but do; so pure withal
In soul: in heart and act such conscious, yet
Such careless innocence, she made round her
A halo of delight; 'twas these which won me;
And that she never schooled within her breast
One thought or feeling, but gave holiday
To all; and that she made all even mine,
In the communion of love: and we
Grew like each other, for we loved each other;
She, mild and generous as the air in spring;
And I, like earth, all budding out with love.

THE LOVER'S PANGS AT PARTING.

It was even thus.
I said we were to part. She nothing spake,
There was no discord; it was music ceased;
Life's thrilling, bounding, glorying joy, ceased. Sate
Like a house-god, she, her hands fixed on her knee.
Her dark hair loose and long, the wild bright eye
Of desolation flashed through, lay around her.
She spake not, moved not; more than act or speech
Her eye I felt. I came and knelt beside her.
And my heart shook this building of my breast,
Like a live engine booming up and down.
It is the saddest and the sorest sight,
One's own love weeping.

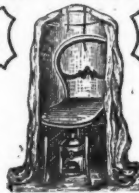
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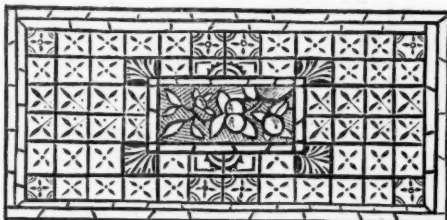
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SATURDAY, OCTOBER 4, 1884.

PRICE TWOPENCE.

GERALD.

BY ELEANOR C. PRICE.

CHAPTER XXXIII. DIAMOND-DIGGING.

THIS was the only little cloud, except clouds of dust and clouds of flies, which troubled Theo's happiness at that time. These, with Gerald, were to be preferred to the clearest and purest atmosphere without him. This nonsensical remark was gravely made to him by his wife, not long after they came to Kimberley. Gerald laughed, and made some affectionate answer; but these outward discomforts plagued him more than her. He did not mind the people much, or the moral feeling of the place; but he did mind the dust and the flies. However, he said nothing about going back to England, and Theo did not breathe a wish on that subject. He shrank from the thought of her relations, and he knew that either paying work or paying speculation would be more out of his way there than here. Of course he saw that, as an unmarried man, he could have got on here as well as many other young fellows; the first horror of the place had said that he could not, but now, on further acquaintance, he began to perceive that he could; and he had moments of sincere repentance for bringing Theo here—if not, as Mrs. Lee said, to make a fortune for her. But Theo was so brave, and happy, and patient; he knew that in her dear romantic mind she really meant that silly speech about the dust and the flies. When he came in anxious and desponding—for his spirits were variable—one look into her sweet face was enough to bring hope and courage back again; and every day she seemed to be a little happier, a little more contented, as fresh interests began to spring up round her.

There were no more small bursts of haughtiness about the people at the Fields, who did not, in fact, trouble her much; her own looks and manners protected her, unconsciously to herself; and after that first visit she could smile good-humouredly at Mrs. Lee. In the next house to theirs, separated from them by a rather melancholy row of blue gum-trees, a digger's wife was slowly recovering from fever. She was a gentle, sad woman, with a good deal of refinement, and Theo spent many hours with her. The poor thing's one longing wish was to go back to England, and not to let her children grow up where they were, wild little Africanders. Theo often carried them off to her own house, and played with them there, for the sake of giving their mother an hour's peace; but she had a great tenderness for children, and a great influence over them. After two or three weeks, the next-door neighbour and her family went away to Barkly for change of air, and then Theo's chief sympathies were called out by a Kafir woman with a sick baby, who used to sit nursing it at the door of her hut, wrapped in a scarlet blanket. The tiny dark face grew yellower and smaller, and more pinched and ghastly, and Theo watched it with a sort of superstition, till one day it was gone, and its poor mother crept out alone from the hut, and looked up at the sun, and round at the desolate camp, and wandered along moaning like an animal in pain till she came to Theo's door, where she crouched down on the ground, and Theo brought her food and tried to comfort her.

Another friend that Theo made at this time was a dog, a funny red beast, the colour of his native dust. The old banker, Gerald's first friend, gave him to her, and he and she soon loved each other faith-

fully. Wool would have looked scornfully upon such a rival as Toby, whose only external beauty was in his honest, loving eyes.

The only people at the Fields with whom Theo and Gerald were really likely to make friends, if they came across them, were a few young Englishmen among the diamond-diggers, who had left civilisation behind and had come out here: some under various kinds of clouds, some only for adventure and fortune. These young men lived here and there at Kimberley, often two or three of them together, dressed in the wildest garments, and spent their time in hunting when they were not sorting diamonds. Gerald did not make friends with any of them at once, for circumstances had made him shy and reserved; he had not the common interest of diamonds, and Englishmen are much the same in their manners everywhere; but he knew several of them slightly, and Theo began to know them by sight, as they walked about the town, and used to say to him sometimes: "There goes a gentleman."

One day he and she had walked up to the edge of the great mine, and were standing there, looking at the work going on. It was a curious sight, and has often been described before, but this was what Theo saw. She looked down into a hole in the earth, like an immense bowl, with steep sides, more than two hundred feet deep, and an extent of some acres. The floor of this was all uneven, dark blue soil, divided into great irregular blocks, like rocks in an old crater. Each of these blocks was a "claim," belonging to a separate man or company, and about each of them a number of Kafirs were working, thousands of small black figures altogether, looking tiny in this immense place, half hidden among the platforms, and terraces, and ditches, and the strange shadows of the mine. They were all at work, though lazily, all these little figures; and the air, as one looked down at them, was full of vibrating wires, making a faint, sharp music as hundreds of buckets came up along them, full of blue soil, wound up by many windlasses, and running down again empty to be filled with soil once more. There was a strange medley of colours in the sides of the mine—red, yellow, blue, all running into each other; the sun was low, so that one side all glowed with the deepest hues, while black, sharp shadows lay across the other.

It was while Theo and Gerald were

looking down on this, standing a little apart from the windlasses, and the buckets, and the Kafirs busy with carts, taking away the stuff to be dried, and washed, and sorted, with a rough-looking white man here and there directing their operations; while he was telling her all he knew about it, and speaking, perhaps, a little enthusiastically—for the whole thing had a strong attraction for him—while they were absorbed in the picture before them, a young man, who had just come out of the mine, stopped and looked at them curiously.

"More picturesque than our old mines, isn't it?" said Gerald.

"Yes, but I like our old mines best," said Theo. "Last year, at Woodcote, I thought they were so very interesting."

Gerald looked at her, smiling, and she laughed and coloured a little.

"Don't be presumptuous," she said in a low voice. "Why should I have been thinking of you? I mean it. I think there is something fine in our men going down into the darkness and the dangers, risking their lives every day that all the houses may be warmed. They want some courage; they and their work are much more romantic really than Kafirs and diamonds, if you think of it seriously."

"Well, all this is more romantic on the surface, at any rate!" said Gerald.

"Ah, but what is romance?" said Theo.

She was looking happy and exalted as she spoke; her eyes, dark and soft, her face with a faint pink flush under her white, shady hat, were lovely and full of expression.

The young man from the mine, who had been lingering near them with furtive glances, now approached so close to them that Gerald turned round and looked at him.

He was roughly dressed, and in his shirt-sleeves, with a slouched hat on his head. He was short, with a light, active figure; looking as if he could walk, and ride, and play games. His skin was tanned dark brown, and the hair on his head was dark, but his beard was a light tawny colour; the sun had bleached it. He had bright, pleasant grey eyes, and was about Gerald's age. There still lingered about him something of the air of an Eton boy, good-humoured, polite, idle, and charming.

"I think you have forgotten me," he said to Gerald, and he took off his hat to Theo with a deprecating smile. "No

wonder, but this opportunity is too good to be lost."

"Why, you are Bob Stirling!" said Gerald, seizing his hand. "He was in the regiment," turning eagerly to Theo. "Bob, this is my wife."

"I supposed so," said Bob, "since I have been lying in wait here three long minutes. Are you making a tour in Africa?" he asked as he shook hands with Theo, who smiled on him brightly. "Is Mr. Fane going to write a book about us? I wish somebody would."

"Oh no; we are living here," said Theo.

"What on earth——" began Mr. Stirling, and he stared at Gerald and was silent.

Bob Stirling was by nature curious and talkative, but he asked no more questions then. He did not even say much about having unaccountably lost sight of Gerald after he left the army; he only said one or two nice things about their old friendship, and told him he was not changed in the least.

"I can't say that to you," said Gerald. "I may have passed you in the street fifty times—most likely I have, for I came here in June."

"I should not have passed you," said Bob. "You are wonderfully well preserved, but now you will let him grow his beard, Mrs. Fane, and then it will be all up with his good looks, and the old associations."

"Oh no, never," said Theo.

"How is it, then, that we have not met before?" said Gerald.

"I went down to Cape Town in June, and came back in August, and had the fever, and have been on the Vaal River ever since, picking up again. I only came home two days ago. You and Mrs. Fane have not had the fever? A pleasure to come."

He went on to tell them very frankly all his concerns. He had left the army two years ago, being one of a large family, and finding his pay an empty delusion: he had come out here with two of his friends—Slater and Cumming.

"You remember Slater—fat boy—he's thin enough now, poor beggar! awfully cadaverous, always having fever. He's got it now."

They had been working hard, and on the whole had had wonderfully good luck.

"In another year I shall be rich enough to go home, and stay there," said Mr. Stirling.

"Don't you think it will be very funny to live in England again?" said Theo.

"Yes, but on the whole I shall like it. I'm not naturally savage, in spite of my appearance, which I never felt ashamed of till now."

After a little more talk, Mr. Stirling remarked that it was sorting-time, and asked Theo if she would come and sort for him.

"You will bring me luck, Mrs. Fane, I know," he said.

So they walked across with him to his ground near the mine, where his partner, Mr. Cumming, a dark, silent man, was already sitting at a table, with Kafirs and buckets in attendance, and heaps of waste blue soil in the background. The Kafirs rolled their wild eyes on Theo and Gerald as they came up. Mr. Cumming moved away from the table, rather terrified at the sight of a lady; he was not such a sociable character as his friend Bob, and he had no former acquaintance with Gerald Fane.

"Now, Mrs. Fane, sit here, please," said Bob, and Theo took her place on a rough stool behind the table.

It was a strange scene; the great sky that blazed with evening light, the groups of black, degraded-looking figures standing round, the dryness, the desolation of red sand and blue crumbling soil, without a tree or blade of grass to be seen; the two young diggers, with shirt-sleeves turned up on arms as brown as their faces, Mr. Cumming talking to Gerald a yard or two away, and Mr. Stirling standing by Theo with laughing eyes, to preside over her first attempt at sorting.

A Kafir with a most repulsive face came forward with a large sieve of blue stuff, and poured it on the table before Mrs. Fane. Bob Stirling put a piece of slate into her hand, to shovel the stuff about with, and she began her sorting.

At first the stuff seemed full of sparkling things, over which she exclaimed, thinking that each of them was a diamond. Gerald now came up and looked over her shoulder with eager interest, though he had often helped at sorting before. The deceptive sparkles came from bits of spar, or from crystals, which were not at first so easily distinguished from diamonds, till Bob Stirling put them between his teeth; if they felt breakable they were worth nothing. In the end Theo's sorting produced about a dozen diamonds, and two of these were large, fine ones. The diggers were much pleased, saying it was the best

sort they had had for some time; they begged her to come and sort for them again as soon as she would, for a lady was always luckier than a man.

"Perhaps, if you will come, Mrs. Fane," said Mr. Cumming solemnly, "there may be a chance of Stirling attending to his business a little more. He's the idlest fellow; he leaves it all to me, and if I wasn't the soul of honesty, he would be ruined in no time."

"I must certainly come and look after his interests," said Theo, smiling. "He has been ill, so what could he do?"

"Have I really got a friend to stand up for me?" exclaimed Bob in a low voice.

He was perfectly happy with his new-found friends, and Cumming, who was lonely, looked rather enviously after him as he walked away with them.

Gerald and he were talking about old times, and Theo, listening to them, felt as if all this was a strange, incongruous dream. Both surely could not be real—civilised life in green, shady, cloudy England, where fields, and hedges, and gardens were, and all the thousand details (so unnecessary they seemed now) which took up every day; all that felt so far off now, that Theo felt as if she could never, possibly, see it all again.

They passed along by crowds of Kafirs just come out of the mine, with scarlet coats and black legs, shouting, screaming, dancing. By the wayside sat the coolies, with their baskets of fruit for sale; rough white men lounged by smoking, with their hands in their pockets, wearing large hats lined with green; all was noise and colour in the deep, glorious glow of sunset.

Bob Stirling came and spent that evening with Gerald and Theo, and many evenings afterwards; he was so friendly, so helpful and good-tempered, that they never found him a bore. He brought his friends to see them, and very soon they had no want of acquaintances; all the best of the young men in Kimberley came to their house, and worshipped Theo, and made friends with Gerald. Life was very happy. They went out riding on the veldt in the early morning, and by moonlight; the opinions of their neighbours did not trouble them, though it grew hotter every day. And, after all, Gerald did not seem foolish when he said again that the only good reason for living here was diamonds, and that he thought he must buy a claim, and try his luck like all these other fellows.

Theo smiled a little indifferently, and

said: "Well, as you like." She did not mind much; perhaps she was drifting into that lazy, languid, don't-care state of mind, which seems to be one of the two poles of life in South Africa.

MARY READ, THE PIRATE.

AMONG the authentic histories of pirates in the early part of the seventeenth century, none is as curious and interesting as that of the woman whose name is at the head of this paper, and there are facts in her remarkable career which, as they show her to have been far removed from ordinary malefactors of any time, seem to me worth recording. Under other circumstances, and with a different training, she might have been a Joan of Arc, a Marguerite d'Anjou, a Maid of Saragossa. The nobility and devotion of her character were scarcely less conspicuous than her extraordinary courage and contempt of danger, and I see no reason to doubt the truth of her repeated assertion that the life she had been led to adopt was not that of her choice.

Mary Read was born probably in the last years of the seventeenth century, as at the time of her trial in November, 1720, she was still a young woman. Her mother was married to a sailor, who went to sea soon afterwards, some time before the birth of a child—a boy. Its father is supposed to have been lost, or to have died at sea; at all events, he never returned to the young wife, whose conduct, however, soon showed her not to be inconsolable. She bore the character of a respectable woman in her neighbourhood, and, to save her reputation, finding, the year after the birth of her boy, that she was likely again to become a mother, she left London, saying she was going to live in the country with some friends. In the retreat which she found she was delivered of a girl, and about the same time the boy died. This chance circumstance led to the deception upon which the whole of Mary Read's career was based.

Mrs. Read, after a year or two, fell into straitened circumstances, and bethinking her that her mother-in-law was well off, and would provide for this child if she could palm it upon the old woman as her grandson, she dressed Mary as a boy, and brought her to London. The deception was perfectly successful. The supposed grandmother proposed to take the child, and

bring it up; but this, of course, would have led to detection, and Mrs. Read, declaring that it would break her heart to be separated from her boy, consented to live near at hand, receiving a crown weekly for his maintenance.

Things continued thus for a few years. Mary's sex was never suspected by the Read grandmother, and she was brought up in all respects as a boy. But when the old woman at length died, the allowance ceased, and Mary, being more than twelve years old, Mrs. Read conceived the idea of sending her out, as a page, to wait on a French lady. Probably the restraints and habits of servitude did not suit the roving tendencies of the young adventuress, for she does not seem to have remained in this position long, but to have entered herself on board a man-of-war, where she served before the mast some time. How it came about that she exchanged the sea for the land service we are not told, but we next hear of her in Flanders, where she carried arms, first in a regiment of foot, and then in the cavalry. The youthful trooper behaved so gallantly in several actions, that he won the admiration and esteem of his officers. His horse was better groomed, his accoutrements better kept, than any man's; he was what would be termed now "a very smart soldier," until, unhappily for her, the woman's heart, under its cuirass, betrayed her, and Mary fell in love.

The object of her attachment was a young Fleming, who was her comrade in arms, and who, though he occupied the same tent, was long before he suspected her sex. The rashness with which she exposed herself to danger wherever she was, to the length of rushing out to join any attacking-party, even when not commanded to do so, led her companion and many other troopers to believe that the mind of the young volunteer was unhinged, and it was not till the Fleming discovered her secret, that the motive of her conduct—so gratifying to his vanity—became apparent. But the modesty and reserve of the girl, when she had revealed herself, were, strange to relate, not less remarkable than her valour in the field. She loved the man passionately, but resisted all his temptations until he offered to make her his wife, then they exchanged vows, and remained fighting side by side as long as the campaign lasted. When they marched into winter quarters at Breda, Mary publicly proclaimed her sex, as-

sumed woman's clothes, and was married to her Fleming in presence of several officers and a great concourse of people, drawn together by the curious story, which excited much interest at the time. Everyone gave the bride a present as a contribution towards housekeeping, and, thus set up, they purchased their discharge, and opened an eating-house, or ordinary, at the sign of The Three Horse Shoes, near the castle, where they established a good trade under the patronage of several of the officers.

But poor Mary's happiness did not last long. Her husband died, and, in addition to her grief, circumstances conspired about the same time to reduce her to poverty. The peace was concluded; there was no longer a resort of officers at Breda; the widow, having little or no trade, was forced to give up her ordinary. Her substance was spent—what was she to do for a living? The old life was the only one that suggested itself to the young, vigorous woman, now left without ties and without funds. She again assumed man's apparel, and served for a time with a regiment in Holland, but as there was no chance of preferment in time of peace, she formed a resolution of seeking her fortunes in another way, and shipped herself on board a vessel bound for the West Indies. This vessel, on its outward passage, was captured by English pirates, who plundered the ship and let it go again, keeping Mary—her sex undivulged—a prisoner.

Here, no doubt, her mind became accustomed, though her conscience was never really reconciled, to the idea of a lawless life. The King's proclamation came out shortly afterwards, offering pardon to all such pirates as should voluntarily surrender themselves by a certain day, and the crew by whom Mary had been captured, taking advantage of this, gave themselves up to the governor of the neighbouring island, where they lived peaceably upon their capital for a time. But Mary had no means of subsistence, and hearing that Captain Woods Rogers, the Governor of the Island of Providence, was fitting out some privateers to cruise against the Spaniards, she, with some others, embarked for that place, and offered their services to the governor.

We now come to the period of her life which it is most difficult to extenuate, unless we accept in full her own repeated declaration that it was only on compulsion that she acted as she did. All that is

certainly known is, that the crews of some of these privateers, shortly after sailing, rose against their commanders, and returned to their old trade of piracy. Among those who took up arms was Mary Read, but it is quite possible to conceive that she had no choice in the matter. The mutiny of a whole shipful of cut-throats would have left a solitary man powerless to remonstrate or to contend against it. The evidence on her trial deposed that in all the actions which followed no one was more resolute, more ready to board, or undertake any hazardous adventure than Mary Read; but this is not absolutely inconsistent with the supposition that she had been driven to adopt a course of life against which her higher instinct rebelled. "That which thy hand findeth to do, do it with all thy might," seems to have been the ruling principle of this extraordinary woman's life. When the ship was attacked and taken, none kept the deck save Mary Read, and a certain Anne Bonny, of whom we shall speak presently, and one more, upon which Mary called to those below to come up and fight like men, and finding they did not stir, she fired down the hold upon them, killing one and wounding others. It is fair to mention that she declared this statement to be false, upon her oath, though she did not attempt to deny the main facts in the charges brought against her.

Anne Bonny was a woman of fierce and fiery nature, unredeemed by a spark of the nobility and self-devotion which lift Mary Read out of the ranks of unsexed termagants. Anne had eloped from her husband, in Providence, with Captain Rackam, the pirate, with whom she had gone to sea in man's clothes, and both these worthies were on board the same ship with Mary, who had now to encounter difficulties and troubles of a fresh kind. Anne Bonny fell violently in love with the handsome young sailor—Mary's sex was not so much as suspected by anyone on board—and Rackam's jealousy was roused by Anne to such a pitch that he declared he would cut her new lover's throat. It was not till Mary had confided her secret to Anne, who hastened, in turn, to appease her protector by revealing it to him, that peace was restored, and this strange episode of love at cross-purposes terminated.

And now comes the second and last romance in Mary's life. In their cruise they had captured a great number of ships belonging to Jamaica and other parts of

the West Indies, bound to and from England; and whenever they found on board any artist, or other ingenious person, who they conceived might be of service to them, if he was unwilling to join them, it was customary to keep him by force. Among the number was a young man "of most engaging behaviour," who seems by degrees to have won Mary's heart. He confessed frankly that he had a horror of piracy; she agreed with him in condemning it, declaring that she only desired an opportunity of quitting a course of life which was utterly distasteful to her. They became messmates, and when their friendship had ripened, she gradually suffered him to discover that the feeling on her side had developed into a yet warmer one, as from woman to man.

The youth's surprise can readily be imagined, and his incipient love was quickly fanned into a flame by an action of hers which showed of what stuff Mary was made. The history of true love has, perhaps, no more strange and touching incident to record.

Her lover, having had a quarrel with one of the pirates, and their ship then lying at anchor near one of the islands, it was arranged that they should go on shore in the morning and fight. Mary was a prey to anxiety and apprehension for her lover. She would not have him refuse the challenge, for to be branded as a coward was unendurable in her eyes. On the other hand, she knew the pirate to be a much better swordsman, and she dreaded the result of the encounter. In this strait, her feminine wit, aided by her masculine courage, befriended her. She was not afraid for her own life; so long as his was saved, no matter if her own were sacrificed. She contrived to pick a quarrel with the antagonist himself, challenged him, and insisted upon his meeting her on the sands two hours before the time appointed for the duel with her lover. There she fought him with the sword, and killed him on the spot.

They were bound to each other for ever after this, but the duration of this second tie was even shorter, in poor Mary's case, than the first. The pirates' vessel, under Rackam, was captured in November, 1726, by Captain Barnet, who brought her into Port Royal, in Jamaica, and a Court of Admiralty was held at St. Iago de la Vega, to try the culprits. It was shown, on evidence, that her husband

had been detained on board against his will, but Mary was, of course, imprisoned and tried. Her defence was ingenious and eloquent, but the evidence against her was strong, and it is possible that her execution would not have been respited, but for her condition. She pleaded that she was shortly to become a mother. She defied her accusers to show that she had ever been other than a virtuous, modest woman, faithful to her husband, and only as desirous as he was to lead an honest life. How it might have fared with her, had she not died in prison, it is impossible to say. Considerable sympathy was shown for her at the time, and the brief narrative of her career, published a few years later, proves that contemporaneous criticism was disposed to take a not unfavourable view of the character of this singular woman. That she was made for better things there can be no doubt; she was no ordinary adventuress. The qualities that distinguished her were such as are rare in man or woman, and though, in the conventional routine of modern life, such qualities would generally be useless, and difficult to adjust to the machinery of a woman's existence, we cannot but feel admiration for dauntless courage and devoted self-sacrifice wherever they are found. In the world's currency, this poor criminal was as a worthless coin; the image and superscription had been defaced. But the metal was sterling, for all that. Will not much which is readily accepted amongst us now, sharp-cut to touch, and burnished to sight, prove to be forged dross when tested in the Mint, hereafter?

THE AFTERGLOW.

THE August afterglow over the sea ;
 The great red sun has gone to his rest
 By the mighty Head in the ocean's breast ;
 She sighed a sigh of utter content,
 A sigh that in long, full, glittering heave,
 Lifted her breast to the light of eve,
 As his burning lip to her lip he bent
 And sank in her arms like a bird to its nest ;
 And the warm love-light in his closing eyes,
 Flushed the great blue seas, and the great blue
 skies,
 And left the roseate gleam to be,
 The August afterglow over the sea.
 The August afterglow over the sea ;
 From the south the light wind swept along,
 As tender as hope, and as soft as song,
 Crisping the surface sheen of the wave,
 Till it rippled and laughed in shine and shade,
 As the gleam or the gloom across it played ;
 And a musical echo back it gave,
 From its depths the brown seaweeds among,
 That swayed and tossed at the foot of the Head
 That an hour ago shone dusky red,
 As it watched in its rugged majesty,
 The August afterglow over the sea.

OUR SHINING RIVER.

IX.

THE days we passed at Goring are, for some of us, to be marked with the whitest of chalk. Not only was the place itself charming, the weather magnificent, and the air brisk and bracing, more like that of a mountain region than of a river valley ; but there was as well for me the sweet companionship of a fresh and guileless nature, warmed by the first glow of passion, which had never till now been awakened. Mr. Pyecroft was, I think, on my side from the first. After what had passed, he told his wife that he would never entrust his daughter to Charlwood's keeping. Whatever might happen to him personally, he had set his foot down upon that. And Boothby, too, recalled to join his womankind at Oxford, and continue their tour on wheels—Boothby patted me encouragingly on the back, and bade me "go in and win." He was a little nervous about the trust-money, but he was not going to see his little ward made miserable—no, not if he had to bang down the whole of the missing sum. Not that he expected to have to do it, he added hastily ; for, of course, he had his own girls to think about. But Mrs. Pyecroft still held out, and clung to her old plans.

And Charlwood was nowhere to be found. Old Thomas knew nothing about him, evidently. The young Albert came to church on the following morning, evidently to see what we were about. And he was charged with a message of abject apology from his father for his behaviour of the night before—an apology which Mrs. Pyecroft received graciously enough.

Mr. Pyecroft had been exploring the region of chalk-downs beyond Streatley, whose ranges stretch, without a break, through a thinly-populated region to the verge of Salisbury Plain, and following the course of the old British trackway, which may still be traced along the ridges of the downs that overlook the vale of the White Horse. He was mildly interested, too, in the discovery that Goring once bore the name of Little Nottingham, perhaps from a settlement of stocking-weavers here ; of whom, however, there remains no trace, unless in the sign of our inn, The Miller of Mansfield, which suggests rather traditions of Robin Hood and Sherwood Forest, than of the outlaws of the Chilterns. The twin villages, too, separated by a hostile tariff, the penny-toll for foot-passengers, which is

exacted both coming and going, and which forms a potent barrier between the two communities, excite a certain amount of speculation. Why should there be two villages, two churches, two parochial administrations in such close neighbourhood, of equal antiquity, and of rival importance? Other instances of these twin settlements occur along Thames side—Whitchurch and Pangbourne; a little lower down the river, Windsor and Eton; and, more familiar still, Putney and Fulham, with churches that seem to be on speaking terms; all of which suggest that the river was the boundary between different tribes of men, as well as of the administrative area of the counties.

Then there is the drive to Pangbourne, where the road winds its way up the hill, sometimes overshadowed by trees, and sometimes open to the ever-widening landscape, with the broad reaches of the river shining in tranquil beauty, while beyond rise the billowy, tufted hills of the Chilterns. And there is nothing much better of its kind than the descent into Pangbourne, with its terraced woods, its sunny, pleasant houses, its lock, its streams, its weirs, its broken waters swiftly rushing, or slowly eddying, under the wooded banks. And then we rumble over the old wooden bridge, and so back to Goring by a road which, making up the side of a hill, loses sight of the river, and takes us back to Goring by a less interesting route. For hereabouts, when you lose sight of the river, you miss the whole charm of the scene. It is the river that has made the scenery, and when the bold escarpments and terraced heights of its handiwork are left behind, everything becomes tame and insipid.

Nor shall we soon forget the long, pleasant days spent in some shady nook with rod and line, watching the light float as it saunters quietly along with its gentle, mysterious movements and quiverings, varied by a sudden pirouette as it encounters an eddy, or a quick, unexpected dive in artful simulation of a "bite," for what after all proves to be only a straggling branch of weed. Claudia brings her sketching-materials and makes blotchy studies of river and trees, and mademoiselle generally stops in the boat, well propped up with cushions, and working a little, and dozing a little, alternately.

In one of our fishing expeditions we encountered Rebecca and her brother, and presently joined our forces. Rebecca appeared so tranquil and contented that

it was evident she was satisfied as to the cause of Charlwood's absence; and, indeed, in confidence to me she expressed herself as quite without alarm upon the subject. Rebecca was an excellent fisherwoman, and challenged Claudia, who had some pretensions that way herself, to a trial of skill, each to take a certain swim, and the result of two hours' fishing to decide the championship. "Twas merry when you wagger'd on your angling." And, indeed, the affair assumed quite a sporting aspect, although there was too much laughing and talking to give the fishing a fair chance. But Albert was very assiduous in providing bait for Claudia's hook, and I performed the same bottle-holding office for Rebecca.

Here was the opportunity for which Rebecca had, perhaps, angled, affording time for a little confidential talk upon the subject of Charlwood and his prospects. Rebecca had recognised me as a friend—even if my friendship had not been quite disinterested.

"My pa has all kinds of schemes," she remarked, as her float went lightly down the stream. "But I don't agree with them. Charley has got to be something, or do something, and not to be hanging around on what my pa can give him. And Charley has got all the makings of a man about him, only he's spoilt with having all his own way. Now he won't have all his own way with me."

That was quite evident, and it promised well for the future happiness of the wedded pair—if ever they became so—that this should be the case. Rebecca having nodded assent to my appreciative remarks, thus pursued the subject:

"Now, what my pa is about, and I don't think he ought to, is what he calls to buy up Charley right out. I don't think he has much left, poor Charley, but it seems that he has a sort of off-chance for some property, if his cousin, Miss Pyecroft there, should die before she was twenty-one. There! I thought my bait was gone. Mr. Penrice, will you pick out the reddest and toughest of those red worms?"

When Rebecca's bait was properly adjusted and once more sent on its journey down the stream—she was fishing with a Nottingham reel, and a gossamer-like running line, and handled her rod like a past mistress of the craft—well, just as the light float had reached the end of the swim, something plucked it violently down, and next moment the light rod was

bent almost double with the rush of a big fish. Alas! the line had kinked, had broken—the fish was gone, and we looked blankly into each other's faces.

"There!" cried Rebecca, flinging down her rod in a passion of mortification, "if that girl beats me, I'll never forgive her!"

The loss of that fish indeed promised to be fatal to Rebecca's chances. The hubbub created in the water had, no doubt, frightened and put on its guard every fish in the swim, and by the conditions of the contest, the competitors were not allowed to change their stations.

"Well, we'll sit down till all's quiet," said Rebecca, "and then try our luck again."

And so we found a seat on an old gnarled alder, and went on talking. But Rebecca did not revert to the broken thread of her narrative. Perhaps the loss of her fish had made her feel less amiably disposed towards the Pycrofts. At all events, she would talk of anything else—boating, fishing, and all kinds of things, winding up with discourse on sentiment and the affections. Rebecca had strong, racy ideas of her own, and she talked well, and listened sympathetically. Perhaps there was a touch of coquetry about her which did not render her manner less winning. Anyhow, we lost count of the time, and forgot all about the match—till suddenly Claudia and her companion appeared before us.

Claudia had caught a roach of about two ounces weight, and thus, as Rebecca had landed nothing, she became the winner of the prize. But she did not seem to take much pleasure in her triumph, although Albert was saying all kinds of fine things in praise of her skill, while Rebecca made fun of the small roach, and of everything that was said or done.

"I shall come up this evening, if I may," Albert had said, as we parted.

"I am sure mamma will be glad to see you," Claudia had graciously replied.

"He is terrible, that young man," said mademoiselle, who had heard these last words. Albert, it may be said, had never been ordinarily civil to mademoiselle, whom he regarded as "only the governess," and that lady in consequence detested him cordially. "I wonder that you should encourage him to come."

"He has been very kind and attentive," said Claudia curtly. And all the way home she was silent and irresponsible. But Claudia has not yet acquired the habit of keeping

up her wrath. She has still the childish instinct to "kiss and be friends," and to blame herself when there is any little falling out between us. And by-and-by it appeared, from certain wistful glances and the drooping of the corners of her sweet little mouth, that she wanted either to forgive or be forgiven—she was not quite sure which.

"I was a dreadful bear about that fishing business," I ventured to remark, when nobody was looking our way.

"You were odious," cried Claudia; "but why should I have been cross?" There was sweet reconciliation in her glance, and a soft cadence in her voice, as if to make amends for past unkindness, which indeed had been of the lightest possible texture.

But after dinner we were surprised by a visit from Mr. Thomas himself, accompanied by his son Albert, both being in full tenue, with gloves and button-holes, as if intending a quite official and diplomatic visit. Mr. Thomas had a long interview apart with the elder Pycrofts, and at the end of it Mrs. Pycroft came in some agitation to ask my advice. Mr. Thomas had proposed in due form a double alliance between the families.

"I had no idea he was so well off," said Mrs. Pycroft, as if in extenuation of the man's audacity, "and he tells me that the greater part of his money was made in successful speculations. Of course that does not make any difference. And he would make fine settlements on Claudia. It would be humiliation in one generation, to be followed by increased importance in the next."

And the alternative? Mr. Thomas made no secret of his intentions, should his proposal be refused. He would have Mr. Pycroft and his co-trustee pilloried in Chancery, and would bring ruin upon the family.

And what had Mrs. Pycroft replied to all this? Well, she had temporised. She could do nothing till she had seen her nephew Charlwood, who was for the moment away from home. Mr. Thomas manoeuvred adroitly to find out what had become of Charlwood, but Mrs. Pycroft was able to baffle his curiosity, as she did not know herself, and, in the end, a week's truce or respite had been agreed upon, and Mr. Thomas had departed, well-satisfied, it seemed, that a basis for negotiation had been laid down.

Many things may have happened before that period of time is over, and I feel sure

that, unless with Charlwood's connivance, Mr. Thomas is quite powerless to do any harm. And we are more than likely to come across Charlwood lower down the river. He is not far off, for it is pretty certain that he is in communication with Rebecca. Probably in disgust with Rebecca's relations, and ashamed of his conduct towards his own, he is sulking in one of his favourite retreats on the river, enjoying himself mightily all the while, as is his custom.

Somewhat reassured by these considerations, Mrs. Pycroft gives the signal for departure. Our boat is waiting by the steep little bank below the bridge, and we take leave of the pretty little village that has grown to feel quite home-like for us. At the moment we push off into the stream, the elder Pycrofts are thundering over the wooden bridge in their carriage; we shall meet at Wargrave this evening, and, in the meantime, we have the whole of a long, delightful day before us.

We glide gently down upon the placid stream, between pleasant wooded banks, and then under the wide, echoing arch of the Great Western Railway, and then by a bright, pleasant reach, with Basildon Park in the distance, till we come in sight of the wooded heights of Pangbourne. There is nothing to be seen of the Thomases' house-boat; it has left its moorings by the river-bank, and there is nothing to show its present address, either up or down the river.

At Pangbourne Lock we meet with something like a flotilla of small boats—a sort of Amazonian fleet—the crews being nearly all girls and women, clothed in cool cream-colour and white, with much colour in the way of many bright sunshades and gaily striped wraps. There are many dogs of the party, who bark at each other from the extreme point of the bows, and threaten to topple over in the eagerness to exchange salutations. We are now, indeed, at the very gates of the watery kingdom of Amazonia, a kingdom conventionally, although it owns no masculine ruler—a kind of watery domain, where women seem to have everything their own way. A pleasant, lotus-eating land, if land it can be called, which is mostly water—a land of sunny afternoons, where boats are paddled to and fro by fair, vestal crews, or are moored under the shadow of trees while their occupants read or dream away the long, lazy hours. Originally, perhaps, the Greek legend of the Amazons

had some such justification, derived, it is likely enough, from Arab sailors and merchants, who, coming upon sunny isles in the Indian seas, where women alone were in possession—the men being all away at sea for their season's fishing—brought home strange traveller's tales, embellished and transformed, of this community of women; and so, perhaps, our Amazonia on the Thames is not without its occasional masculine element. Anyhow, the charming inhabitants of this pleasant realm are not hostilely disposed to intruders of the other sex, nor can we attribute their comparative tameness to the fact that, like Selkirk's birds, they are so unaccustomed to man, for here and there we come upon a biped who has signs of incipient whiskers on his carefully shaven face, although such are reduced apparently to a condition of abject serfdom. But we come across girls in punts, fishing; others in birch-bark canoes, cruising about with the fearlessness of mermaids; there is a team of girls on the bank towing a boatload of their sisters up the stream.

Among this gentle company of joyous demoiselles there is a sudden alarm, as when some tall war-ship of the Greeks pushed its way among the light shallops of the Amazonian fleet. There sounds the crack of the whip on the bank, and along the tow-path under the trees, hardly to be traced among the bracken and long grass, paces a labouring horse, while swinging round the corner looms a heavy loaded barge, terrible brass-pot among these vessels of fragile porcelain.

"Don't you be frightened, ladies; I sha'n't touch you," cries the man at the helm to a boatful of girls, who are splashing confusedly towards the bank, but as the great heavy poop swings sullenly round, it seems touch and go with the occupants of that tiny bark.

This is about the last barge that is left in this part of the river, and its owner, perhaps, the last of the bargees, but polished and cultivated by contact with the high civilisation of Amazonia.

"Now, if you'll give me hold of your painter, I'll give you a tow down to Reading," cries the last of the bargees good-naturedly, as he passes us in a weedy piece, where a pole would be more effective than oars; and we are presently hooked on behind the barge, and gliding pleasantly along without trouble or exertion. Our ancient mariner knows the river well from Oxford to Hammersmith, and even has

sailed the troubled waters of Bugsby Reach, and laid up in Barking Creek ; and thus brings into these quiet, sylvan shades a reminder of the sterner purposes which come upon the river as it glides and flows ; when you think of the long smoky reaches alive with barges and steamers, and the docks crowded with shipping, and the river mouth, where the tall, white-winged ships come and go with every tide.

And so we glide past Hardwicke, a solid old mansion, from whose windows the fated Charles Stuart may have thrown a melancholy glance on the shining river below ; and among the woods lower down, in shadowed seclusion, stands Mapledurham, the fine Elizabethan mansion of the Blounts, who have lived there time out of mind, and are best known to fame in the person of the gifted Martha, whom people know something about as the friend of Pope.

Just about here we found ourselves and our barge adrift for a while upon the stream, while our horse and coachman are quietly crossing the river on the ferry-boat, leaving the shaded path under the trees for a more open one along the borders of green meadows. The ferryman's dog sits in grief upon the high bank and howls after its master, till at last, emboldened by despair, it makes a desperate leap into the pool, and rises presently with a sob, to swim after the receding boat. And this is a ferryman who is a pluralist in his way, for he has another ferry lower down, and as soon as he has landed our horse, he pulls after us in a little skiff down the river, to ship our horse across as before. What happens when there is a foot-passenger who wants to cross at one ferry when the passenger is at another, is not quite evident. Perhaps the wayfarer is expected to carry a horn—there is an unrepealed law of Alfred's, surely, to that effect—and to blow it lustily on such an occasion.

But happy must be the ferryman who plies his calling in this secluded realm. Indeed the lot of ferrymen generally in this part of the river is to be envied, one would think, with their homely little cottages by the river-bank, and their battered old boats, that can have changed little in form since the days of the first ferryman, and their pleasant little jaunts across the water with all kinds of company. Red Riding Hood with her basket, and Signor Wolf with his cruel black moustache ; now a princess in disguise, and now an old woman with butter and eggs for the

market. Perhaps the huntsman crosses with his hounds, all in couples, and pulling this way and that, or the squire himself with his little bay cob, taking a short cut from the home-farm to the Leasowes.

And after all, there is more movement than you might think in the life of the barge-mariner. There is not much channel to spare in these narrow waters, and a barge aground would be a sight to excite the laughter of gods and men, and the old lady wants coaxing round the corners sometimes—the coaxing effected with a long cross-handed pole with a turn or two of rope round it ; and what with handling the pole and the tiller, and letting out the tow-rope here and hauling it in there, our ancient mariner has not much time to spare for connected conversation. And then he brings out his horn—he has not forgotten the laws of Alfred, it seems—and blows a potent blast to warn the lock-keeper. "I'm bound to go in first," asserts our mariner, "and these gay folks must come in after me." And our mild-mannered mariner is tenacious of the ancient privileges of his order ; and so we float into the pretty lock of Mapledurham, while a little fleet of cock-boats respectfully make way for us, and then we all sink down together into the cool shades, the big barge threatening a nip occasionally to one or the other, but baulked of its purpose by a judiciously-applied head-rope.

And now Purley Church appears among the trees, with Purley Park in the immediate background, but whether the diversions of Purley were carried on here we can't exactly ascertain. But here, with a freer course, our mariner becomes more sociable. He makes a sudden dive into his cabin, and emerges with a steaming teapot.

"A cup of tea's always refreshing," he remarks. "Wish I'd stuck to the teapot all my life."

There seems a certain charm, however, in the reminiscence that he hasn't stuck to it all his life. Perhaps the memories that please us most are not always of the teapot order. Anyhow, our friend produces quite a stock of teacups from a little locker, and invites us all to partake. That was a pleasant little tea-drinking under the woods of Tilehurst, where the capacious Roebuck looks down upon the stream, and the white curls of steam from the Great Western trains appear frequently among the trees.

And now the river-banks are studded with splashes of bright red—a forewarning

that we are approaching a military centre, for Tommy Atkins is taking his pleasure on the banks with his fishing-rod and a box of gentles, and a rosy-cheeked damsel or two to bear him company. We have left Amazonia behind us, and come out into a more commonplace world.

At Caversham Bridge we cast off from our friendly vessel, and drift gently to the landing-place, and here we have luncheon in a quite French-looking restaurant overlooking the river—a place that mademoiselle is charmed with, as she finds French-speaking people here. The river, too, reminds her of her beloved Seine; she feels that she is at Passy, or some other place of Parisian resort. The café noir, too, has the flavour of France, and the sugar, too, on the little pewter trays. Ah, it is too touching! Yes, it is her dear Seine that she is permitted to see once more.

A bronzed sailor, who has run up from the Albert Docks in a fierce-looking little black launch called *The Firepump*, remarks that it reminds him of the *Hang-Ho* in China—particulars quoted from memory. There are all kinds of launches here; indeed, we have passed into the regions of the steam-launch. Clusters of launches hang about the bridges, and lie moored in the river, while old, broken-down specimens lurk in the backwaters; and all along the river to Reading we find rather a townified aspect of things.

As for red Reading itself, it does not seem to belong to the Thames exactly, or to be in any way a riverside town. Reading belongs to the railways, and is spreading itself out over the fields at a rate that promises to make it ere long an intermediate metropolis. But, except for viaducts and gasworks, and a businesslike creek, which proves to be the mouth of the Kennet, there is nothing to show of all this upon the river, which only takes a subdued aspect of Wapping for a space, and then passes into green fields and pleasant woods once more.

Pleasantest of all these woods are the woods of Holme Park, with a shady walk along the riverside, which has received the rather Cockneyfied name of *Thames Parade*. After this, we are soon at Sonning, where the hay-carts are still at work—rather later than elsewhere—and we land to look at the church, with its charming chancel-arch. A pleasant little place is Sonning, with its gardens almost too painfully trim and neat. Even the lock itself is among the flower-

beds, and everybody has got something to say to the lock-keeper. "Well, Sadler, how are the bees getting on?" It is one of the penalties of celebrity to have the same things said to you over and over again by all kinds of people, and to have to frame answers that shall be distinguished by a certain amount of originality.

And below Sonning the river becomes for a while a trifle dull; luckily the northward bend of the river favours us with the south-westerly breeze, and hoisting an extempore leg-of-mutton sail after Robinson Crusoe's time-honoured pattern, we skim along merrily enough. And you have the advantage on the river that you seem to be going very fast when at only a moderate rate of speed. The rippling of the water at the bows, the banks that seem to pass quickly by, all the effort and straining of the wind help to give the notion of speed. Else the scenery is Dutchlike and flat, with quiet watercourses winding here and there; and presently, after we have passed Shiplake Lock, comes to join the main stream,

The Lodden slow with silver alders crowned;

a river with a charming Celtic name, that excites expectations which are scarcely realised.

And then we come in sight of Wargrave, snugly nestled under the hills, with its little cluster of pleasant riverside dwellings, and then the "hard" in front of The George and Dragon, with a clump of boats moored there, among which we are quite satisfied to glide to a resting-place. There is something homelike and pleasant about Wargrave, with its snug village-street, that might be something more than a village-street with a little more ambition, and the church with its ivy-mantled tower standing in solemn dignity in its own grove of trees, with the green and ample God's-acre all round. Here, we are told, lies Day, the eccentric theorist, better known than loved by successive generations of children as the author of *Sandford and Merton*—a sort of pinchbeck Rousseau, without the great Frenchman's genius, his strong human sentiment, or his failings. And here he fell a victim to his own, or, perhaps, rather his master's theory of education, having been kicked off and killed by an unbroken colt that he had persisted in riding. One might feel a tenderness for the memory of a high-minded, well-meaning man had one never read or been crammed with his book, so justly nauseous to the healthy appetite of the average schoolboy.

But the great feature of Wargrave to us is its hotel with its hospitable fare that recalls the palmy days of the old English inn. Heavens! what supplies for a quiet family-dinner! what noble salmon! what barons of beef! what pigeon-pies! what custards! what tarts! It would require a Rabelaisian diction to do justice to all this plenty. And the great pike grins at us ferociously from his glass-case, and the monster trout, with his brown, scaly sides; and a sly fox peers from a wall case, and the dog-otter of the district is stealthily gnawing its prey. Then there are the rare birds that have been shot—the black swans, and such like; while to crown all, as you hear the talk and laughter from all sides, as you encounter stalwart men, stalking in in all kinds of strange costumes of wading or fishing pattern, you come to recognise that the heroes are still with us, who have won these trophies from wild nature; the man who hooked the big jack—the man who landed the fat trout, who was in at the death of the sly fox, and who tracked the wily otter to its lair.

And among these jolly, hearty convives I had a kind of instinctive feeling that I should come across Charlwood. This was a favourite haunt of his, and more than once during dinner I thought I recognised his contribution to the general chorus of talk. But perhaps I was wrong. Anyhow, I could see nothing of him when I explored the place after dinner. One or another knew him well, had heard of him as stopping here or there; but nothing recent or definite in the way of information came of my enquiries.

AFTER LONG YEARS.

CHAPTER VI.

THE account, brought to her at Bar-mouth by her nephew in person, of the interview which had taken place at The Cedars, came upon Miss Dunscombe like a thunderbolt. That Colonel Hamilton should have made a confidante of his daughter was wonderful enough; but that he should have extended that confidence to Steenie was far more surprising.

"He knew he was safe," she said to herself scornfully. "There is no proof." But still she knew in her heart, though she would not confess it, she was staggered in her obstinate belief in his guilt. Not greatly—not so much but that she found argument after argument in his disfavour—but still so far shaken that she found

herself obliged to maintain a perpetual conflict with the doubt she could not, do what she would, completely banish. She had so taught herself to believe in the horror she had imagined—had so strengthened herself in it all these years, that nothing short of positive proof to the contrary would ever convince her; but the dead certainty was gone. She could not but see that it would have required something more than audacity—more than foolhardiness—to enable the man, who had been guilty of murder, to tell first his own child, and then the child of his victim, that he had been suspected of it. But then, she argued, to him the crime he had committed had probably never worn the aspect of murder; she had never, in her first agony even, believed the catastrophe to have been other than accidental—and how could he feel sure she had not taken Steenie into her confidence?

This was the ground she went upon with the latter, and he had not the comfort of being able to penetrate her thoughts.

Mr. Burroughes had expressed a wish to remain on at Fair Oak throughout the summer, and to this she consented.

The discovery he was so sure he had made, did not at first meet with any credence on her part, but the hitherto inexplicable mystery which had enveloped her brother-in-law's affairs, no less than his death, gave scope to such possibilities, she confessed herself, upon this point, open to conviction. The little man was half disposed to pay Steenie back in his own coin; but seeing he was in earnest, he relented and threw himself, with all his heart and mind, into the cause. He did not pooh-pooh the suggested application to Scotland Yard; but there were, in his opinion, certain steps which might be taken before it was resorted to, and one of these he lost no time in propounding.

"We must offer a reward," he said, "to any person or persons whatsoever, who can prove having had any transaction or communication with, or knowledge of, Mr. Samuel Elliott. That will be the first move."

"I leave it to you," said Steenie. "All I hope is we shall not come by knowledge we would rather be without, in a vain search for what we really want."

"I would not say that if I were you," observed the other. "I knew your father, remember, and I am not afraid of anything turning up to his disadvantage."

"I don't like the notion of his having

gone under a false name," the young man replied doggedly.

The advertisement was put in nevertheless, and repeated more than once, without obtaining any result.

In the meantime, Steenie was greatly surprised, upon going to dine, as he was in the habit of doing, when none of his acquaintances had been good enough to invite him, at The White Horse one evening, to find Colonel Hamilton established there.

"Mary has gone upon a little visit," he said; "and I did not know what to do with myself. I have nothing to do with the season, nor the season with me, and I don't want to be looked up until I have made my plans, and have a roof of my own over my head; so I thought I would run down here and have a breath of the fresh country air, at any rate."

Steenie felt, and probably looked, a little surprised. True, an odd person, now and again, did come to West Saxford upon no special business whatever, attracted by the river and such small fishing as it afforded, or by the beauty of the surrounding country; but surely there must be a hundred other places in England which would furnish far greater inducements to a man like Colonel Hamilton. He could not understand it; least of all, was he disposed to flatter himself that Mary's father came after him. The Colonel saw his wonderment, and smiled with a quiet, undisguised appreciation of it, which was tantalising enough, but he volunteered no further explanation.

"Perhaps," Ellerton thought, the blood mounting to his face at the mere mental suggestion, "he wants to hear something about me. Well, I have lived amongst the people all my life, and I don't suppose I am without my enemies—nobody is—but I think they'll let me down easy on the whole."

But it was not with this object, though any curiosity he had upon that score was gratified before long, without any trouble upon his part, the Colonel had come. He had had for some time past—in fact, ever since his flying visit to West Saxford two years before—an idea in his head, too shadowy and too devoid of any reasonable foundation to be called a suspicion, which he was eager either to dispel altogether or to justify. If anywhere he could obtain the means of doing one of these two things by it, it would be on the spot where it had sprung into birth. There were facts to be

arrived at, both in the past and present, a knowledge of which could be attained to nowhere else, and it was in search of these that he had taken up his abode at The White Horse.

Two-and-twenty years make a great change in any population, but they do not entirely reconstruct it, in most cases it takes the century to do that—that is to say, if you admit all ages and classes into your calculation. A good many will have died, a good many gone away; but amongst the new comers and the young people who have grown up and are to him who returns as new and strange as those others, there will be some who remember him, and, for the sake of the old days and old associations, are glad to welcome him. Colonel Hamilton found a few such at West Saxford. They invited him, and made the place pleasant to him, and amongst them he heard a great deal he was anxious to know.

People, having no notion of any special interest he took in Stephen Ellerton on the young fellow's own account, and rightly judging that his intimacy with Miss Dunscombe had ceased with his connection with the place at large, spoke freely enough of both, and, as a natural sequence, of Steenie's benefactor. The town clerk did not appear to be a popular man; he was not liberal, and he was reserved; the most amiable point in his character, after his love of his wife and daughter, being his friendship for the little household at Fair Oak. Yes, he had made money, but he had had a hard battle to fight for years; at one time he had scarcely known where to turn; but in the nick of time a distant relation had died and left him a thousand pounds or so, and forthwith the luck turned. There was no doubt he was a good man of business, and had worked "like a nigger" until his health failed. Asked what was the matter with him, the good folks shrugged their shoulders and shook their heads, with a significant little tap of the forehead. Margetts was very shy of the subject, they said, but young Stansfeld was getting sick of the life he was led, and uneasy about his wife, and he talked.

"I fancy the legacy cannot have fallen in when I knew Mr. Bevan," the Colonel remarked casually to somebody who told him the story. "I scarcely heard of him, and out of his office I never met with him."

"I don't suppose it had," was the answer.

"I remember it was said that the good luck came just in time for the baby, and Nellie Stansfeld must be between two and three and twenty. Why, I declare you are shivering, with the thermometer up at ninety degrees! That is what your con-founded hot climates bring a man to. Have some brandy-and-water?"

Steenie did not see much of the Colonel these days, though, one evening out of three possibly, they would dine together at the hotel. As far as the younger man could make out, the one person in the place to whom the elder had taken a fancy, and for whose society he showed a predilection, was Robert Stansfeld, with whom he went walking and fishing, played billiards, and took now and then a hand at whist. Ellerton was ashamed of himself for feeling a little jealous when he heard of this familiarity; it seemed hard that the other's very idleness should give him the opportunity of ingratiating himself with Mary Hamilton's father. The consolation was, he was a married man.

So far, Steenie had met with no encouragement to prosecute his search. Time was going on—it was now three weeks since the advertisement in re Samuel Elliott had been inserted, and there had been no reply to it; and Mr. Burroughes, though he did not fail to remind Ellerton that they could not expect to do more in twenty days than had been done in as many years, felt more and more disposed to have recourse to professional assistance.

"Some of those fellows have a regular genius," he said, apropos of detectives. "But it don't pay them to hurry themselves. We should have to strike a bargain."

The Colonel, to Steenie's surprise and disappointment, declined to enter into the subject at all with Miss Dunscombe's tenant, and had very little to say upon it to the young man himself.

"If you could arrive at anything," he said, "I should be glad, for Mary's sake, and for your own; but I never led you to suppose for one moment that I was sanguine of success, or that I could help you to it. If you hear anything that bears upon it, I hope you will let me know, that is all."

One day, towards the end of the second week he had spent at The White Horse, the landlord told Ellerton the Colonel was talking of going; he was not very well, and fancied the place did not suit him, and Mr. Margetts, who, Steenie then

heard for the first time had been attending him, had paid a longer visit than usual that morning.

Steenie felt annoyed. Everybody, everywhere, he thought, seemed to have conspired to keep him out of their confidence. Only the day before he had been to the Holme, and had been put off as usual, having seen nobody but Nellie, from whom he had gathered little, save that the house-keeper had at last been obliged to give in to the idea of having a nurse. His non-admittance to the sick-room began to be awkward as well as exasperating to him, and altogether he felt uneasy and dissatisfied.

What was the good of it all? he began to say to himself; in point of fact, was not the Colonel's opposition just as decided and just as conclusive as his aunt's? What was the use of a conditional consent, when the conditions were such as could not possibly be fulfilled? He was fainter hearted than he should have been, because he had more upon his mind in other impersonal ways than was good for him; and the more he thought of Mary the wider the gulf seemed to grow that yawned between them.

CHAPTER VII.

"At last, my dear Ellerton! We have a nibble at last!" exclaimed Mr. Burroughes with great animation, pouncing upon Steenie mid-way between the office and the hostelry, some ten days after Colonel Hamilton's departure. "Somebody has turned up at last who knows something of your father—that is to say, of Mr. Elliott. The letter was forwarded from Weyland's this morning, and here it is."

"The fellow takes care not to commit himself, whoever he may be," Steenie observed when he had read it. "Still, he gives his name, and the name of the firm by whom he is employed, so one must conclude he writes in good faith. The question is, Who is to go over there to hear what he has to say? I am tied by the leg, as you know."

"But I am not," the other retorted with alacrity, "and I am your man. I have not gone in much for foreign travel, but I can find my way about abroad, all the same, and I don't suppose it will be harder to get on at Amsterdam than elsewhere. Besides, the man, when I arrive at him, is an Englishman, and will understand me and I him."

"It is very good of you," said Steenie;

and so it was settled. Within the week the energetic little man was back again—triumphant, but with a shadow and seriousness mellowing his triumph, which struck Steenie at first sight.

"You must be prepared," he said, "to be surprised, and, perhaps, even a little shocked, though, possibly, after all, the contingency, up to a certain point, is one we ought to have been prepared for. It was here in West Saxford—in Mr. Bevan's office—that this man Spender became acquainted with the name of Samuel Elliott. He was a clerk in the office, at the time of your father's death, and for some time after, and he is prepared to swear that a person of that name was amongst the clients, though he never to his knowledge saw him, or knew anything about him. Now, nothing could be more natural than that Mr. Bevan, as your father's solicitor, should be in your father's confidence."

"Nothing," Steenie assented.

"The unnatural part of it," pursued the other, "is the keeping silence afterwards, under the extraordinary circumstances. One would have thought that any one possessing the clue to any mystery in the life of a man foully murdered by some unknown assassin, would have felt himself bound to place that clue at the disposal of justice. How Mr. Bevan can have kept his own counsel on the subject, I cannot conceive—that is, supposing the identity established. But it is only fair to tell you, before we enter into that part of the matter at all, that there is a fresh complication. According to our friend Spender—and the man seems straightforward enough—he distinctly understood Mr. Bevan, upon one occasion, that the client of the name of Elliott and the distant relation or connection, who left him the legacy which set him on his feet, were one and the same man. Now, if this were the case, it would stand to reason that I had been misled by an accidental resemblance, and that, after all, my old client and your unfortunate father were separate persons."

"I was afraid that would be the end of it," Steenie said after a pause. "And but for one thing I should be glad and not sorry that it is. All along I felt doubtful, but you were so sure," he added, a little reproachfully, "there was no convincing you."

The other looked hard at him, and there was a world of meaning in the look. Then he said quietly:

"In a case like this, it does not do to jump at conclusions, and it is better that

each man should arrive at his own. Now I have had time to think it all well out between this and Amsterdam, and I would have you set your mind to it in the same way. All I have to say to you in the meantime is, that I am no more convinced of my mistake now than I was before I went over, and I don't believe I ever shall be until I have been face to face with your senior partner himself."

"But you said just now yourself——"

"Never mind what I said. Set your own brains to work, compare facts, and dates, and 'coincidences,' as you call them, and see what they bring you to. It will be time enough to discuss matters when you have done that. By-the-bye, did I tell you Miss Dunscombe has written to my wife that she will be glad of a bed, to-morrow night?"

Steenie said "No;" he knew his aunt was coming up for the day on business, but he had heard nothing of her intention of staying the night. For himself, the first thing he had to do was to write to Colonel Hamilton what had occurred. The post would not wait for him to think the things out, he said to himself, and he felt that Mary and her father had a right to be kept informed of things.

It was late in the evening of the following day. In the dining-room at Fairoak, with the portrait of Stephen Ellerton looking down on them from the wall, were assembled three persons—Miss Dunscombe, Mr. Burroughes, and Steenie. In the face of the stockbroker there was a certain triumph; the other two looked pale and perturbed, the one positively haggard.

"It fits in like the pieces of a puzzle," she was saying in a low, scared voice. "But how is it to be proved? How are we to get at him? And if, after all, we should have made a mistake——"

"My dear madam," the little man at the foot of the table interrupted her to say, "allow me to recapitulate the evidence, if I may call it so, once more. On the morning of the 20th of November, 1860, the original of that portrait left West Saxford by the half-past ten o'clock train for town on business—what business never transpired. A gentleman who travelled up with him parted from him at Euston. Another gentleman of his acquaintance deposed to passing him about one o'clock in the afternoon, within a stone's-throw of Coutts's Bank. Between the time of his arrival in London, therefore, at a quarter

past eleven, and that of his appearance in the Strand at one o'clock, nobody seems to have set eyes upon him; but at twelve o'clock that very day there comes to my place of business by appointment his double, and between the hours of twelve and one—close upon one, as I was afterwards informed—an open cheque given in payment to that double was cashed at Coutts's. You follow me?"

Miss Dunscombe gave a faint gesture of assent.

"At half-past four in the afternoon, the original of that picture was observed to get out of the train, and to give up his ticket at the station here; but it was not until half-past five that he looked in at the club, the walk from the station to the club taking, as you are aware, not more than from five to ten minutes. Where he was and what he was doing in the interim is a question which has remained to this day unanswered. All that is known is that he showed himself in his old haunts to his old friends for a few minutes, looking very bright and well, and that he was never seen by anybody—to bear witness to the fact—again in life. So far, and no farther, can we trace him. Of his double there is no further trace whatever from the moment he leaves the bank. He has an appointment which means money, but he never keeps it; he has an address at which occasionally he calls for letters, but he calls there no more; he is advertised for, but he never answers. He disappears simply and entirely, as though he, too, were dead. Now, at last, after all these years, we hear of him—a client, at the same time, of the same firm, as the man whose living image he would appear to have been, but a client whose person was unknown to the clerks—a client with regard to whom one of them, at any rate, became possessed of the idea that he was a relation, and the source of an accession of fortune which saved his solicitor from bankruptcy. Those are the facts, Miss Dunscombe. I have my own opinion and my own theory, and I am not afraid to confess it. I believe your brother-in-law and the man I have spoken of as his double to be one and the same man, and I believe that the thousand pounds which were handed over Coutts's counter to him, the day of his death, found their way, somehow or other, into Bevan's hands, and were his salvation."

"You shall not say it!" cried Miss Dunscombe. "I cannot allow it to be said. Steenie, what are you about that

you stand by and let your best friend be vilified?"

"We cannot help our convictions, Aunt Margaret," the young man replied quietly. "You, of all people, must allow that. As for me, I wish to judge no one unheard. But, ill or well, some one must see Mr. Bevan."

He excused himself to his host, and promising Miss Dunscombe to return shortly, made his way, expecting he knew not what, bewildered and unhappy, to The White Horse. The landlord met him at the door with the intelligence that Colonel Hamilton was in the house, and was desirous of seeing him. He found him stirred somewhat out of his usual dignified calm, and eager to receive fuller details than it had been possible for Steenie to communicate by letter.

"Well," he observed at last with a deep sigh, "the net seems to me to be drawing in so closely round the miserable wretch, I could almost find it in my heart to pity him. His sin has been so long finding him out, and Heaven only knows what his life must have been in the meantime."

The confidence with which he spoke so startled Steenie that he looked up at him aghast. The Colonel smiled.

"I know more than you suppose," he said. "Mary and I have not been idle. You must remember that my girl had not merely her own happiness at stake, but—though it was in one quarter only—her father's name. Whilst you have been wondering and despairing, she has been at work. She laid her little plan, and I have helped her to carry it out. One of these days—before long, now—you will know all about it."

There was no inducing him to say any more, but the conversation kept flowing continually back into the same channel, showing how exclusively the minds of both were possessed by it. They were smoking their cigars in the inn garden when Robert Stansfeld came out to them there, in a great heat.

"I came on from Fairoak," he said, "to tell you that Miss Dunscombe has gone to The Holme, and that you"—it was to Steenie he addressed himself—"had better get back and hold yourself in readiness, in case you should be sent for. Mr. Bevan is much worse—quite off his head—and the nurse says he keeps calling for your aunt and you. She is the only person who seems to understand him. Nellie is scared out of her senses, and, as for me, I have kept

at a respectful distance all along. I don't understand illness, you know, Colonel, and I've always been a trifle shy of my father-in-law. But the nurse came to me herself this evening, and a very nice young woman she is, too, I can tell you—quite the lady."

"I should think, Ellerton," the Colonel broke in abruptly, "that if there is a chance of your being wanted, the sooner you make your way home the better. Come in with me for a moment first, will you?"

Steenie complied, and Stansfeld, waiting for him outside, was surprised at the glow in his cheeks, and the light in his eyes, when he joined him. At the garden-gate at Fair Oak the young men parted.

Miss Dunscombe, in the meantime, having assented to Stansfeld's proposition that she should then and there satisfy the craving the sick man appeared to have for her presence, with a readiness which had much relieved him—sat talking in hushed tones to Nellie, in Mr. Bevan's dressing-room.

"No," the young wife was saying, in answer to her enquiry; "we have not sent for Mr. Margetts. He has been here twice to-day, and he says nothing can be done, unless he becomes violent, and then," with a half sob, "there would only be the one thing. But I don't believe it will ever come to that. And oh, Miss Dunscombe! is it very wicked of me to wish that it might end any other way—any?" cried poor Nellie.

The elder woman turned her face away abruptly to hide the sudden spasm that contracted it. If the girl only knew one other way in which it might end, to which even the terrible death in life of a mad-house would be preferable!

"What does the nurse think?" she asked. "And where did you get her from? She looks young to have had much experience, but then experience seems to be the last qualification that is required nowadays for work of any sort."

"I am sure I don't know whether she has had much or not," Nellie replied carelessly. "It was Mr. Margetts who got her down from town for us, and I like her immensely. She is so gentle and clever, and nothing seems to put her out. How she stands the nights I don't know. Joliffe said it made her blood curdle to listen to all the horrors he imagined—poor dear father! But I suppose these people are trained to it."

As she finished speaking the door that led

out of the dressing-room into the passage was gently opened, and Robert Stansfeld put his head in, whilst at the same moment the figure of the nurse, tall and slight, in her soft grey dress and white apron, appeared in the opening between the two rooms.

"I think you might come in now," she said, addressing Miss Dunscombe. "He is awake and seems better. Yes, if you please," as Nellie made a movement as though to join her husband; "one at a time, Mrs. Stansfeld."

The young wife acquiesced silently, and Miss Dunscombe followed the nurse into the sick-room unaccompanied. It was a large room, dimly lighted, and the heavy crimson hangings of the bedstead rendered still more apparent the almost ashen pallor of the face that rested on the pillows. Robust-looking the lawyer had never been, but the wan, shrunken outline of his features as she now saw them, shocked and startled his visitor.

"I have brought an old friend to see you," the nurse said in her clear, low voice. "You have talked of her very often. Here she is."

She turned pale herself as she spoke, but Miss Dunscombe did not observe it, as she bent over the sick man, and touched gently, as if afraid of hurting it, the hand that lay on the coverlet.

"I am so sorry to find you so ill, Mr. Bevan," she said earnestly.

For the moment the cruel doubt and suspicion which had been aroused in her heart lay dormant, and she felt nothing but compassion for the wreck before her. He was looking at her with strange, vacant eyes.

"I—I have not the pleasure," he said.

She drew back inexpressibly shocked. His non-recognition was a thing she was not prepared for. The nurse touched her gently on the arm, and gave her the cue.

"Say something of your nephew," she whispered.

"Don't you remember me—Steenie's aunt?" Miss Dunscombe demanded of the sick man.

He looked up with a weak, absent sort of smile.

"Yes—yes," he said politely; "remember me to him, if you please."

"He is so distressed about your illness, and he is so anxious you should know he is doing his best," she persisted, dwelling on each word to emphasise it and arrest his attention. "He has wished to see you so much."

The invalid contracted his brows as if urging his memory to an effort.

"In the holidays," he said at last. "Yes, in the holidays, if he is a good boy," and then with a smile, half cunning, half vacant, he muttered something, of which only the word "tip" was audible. As he did so, he closed his eyes, and turned his head away, and Miss Dunscombe, for once in her life fairly disconcerted, fell back a few paces beside the nurse.

"Why, his memory is gone," she said. "It was of no use my coming. It will be of no use my remaining. I can do no good here."

The nurse led the way quietly and softly back into the dressing-room. Nellie Stansfeld had not returned to it, and the two women were, for the moment, alone.

"You will stay the night?" the nurse said, in a voice which, subdued as it was, had in it—or so it appeared to her companion—not less of command than enquiry. The tone was one she was so unaccustomed to, that involuntarily Miss Dunscombe resented it.

"Certainly not," she replied stiffly. "In Mr. Bevan's present state there is nothing to be gained by it, and Mrs. Stansfeld will not expect it."

"But if something were to be gained by it, Miss Dunscombe?"

The earnestness of her manner, and the refinement of her articulation, so far modified the effect of her persistency as to ensure her a civil reply.

"It is good of you to be so much interested, but I assure you there is nothing," Miss Dunscombe said with polite decision. "I am only keeping you from your patient as it is, and I will wish you good evening. I shall find Mrs. Stansfeld downstairs."

"Excuse me, Miss Dunscombe, but I cannot let you go," the nurse said firmly. "I require it of you as an act of justice—as an act of atonement, to watch with me this one night by the bedside yonder."

For a moment the older woman stood silent in her astonishment; then, fixing her eyes, with a world of scornful enquiry in them, on the pale, proud face of the other: "You require it of me?" she repeated slowly and with intense haughtiness.

"And, pray, who are you?"

"I am Mary Hamilton," was the answer. "The daughter of the man you have wronged by your suspicions for more than twenty years past, and the promised wife of your nephew."

The low, clear voice in which the words were uttered—for not all her excitement made the girl forgetful of the proximity of

the sick-room—added to their impressiveness, and Miss Dunscombe staggered for a moment as though a blow had been dealt her.

It was but for the moment, however, for as Mary made a movement forward as if to assist her, she waved her hastily off, and supporting herself with one hand on the table next her, confronted her with an ashen face, and an expression half fearful, half defiant.

"And what brought you here," she demanded harshly, "masquerading in a character that is not your own?"

The contemptuous tone, the contemptuous words, brought to the girl's cheeks the colour, to her eyes the fire, of which the painful experiences of the last few days had robbed them.

"I came here, masquerading, as you are pleased to call it," she replied with a haughtiness equal to Miss Dunscombe's own, "to perform a duty which had been left undone by you and yours since before I was born. I came here, Miss Dunscombe, on the track of the murderer." Her voice sank and she shivered as the last word passed her lips, and she went on quickly, as though to cover it: "My father's suspicions were roused by things he heard down here in connection with Mr. Bevan's illness and the state of his mind, and he conceived a great wish—for my sake and Steenie's far more than for his own—to set his doubts at rest. There was one only way in which it could be done, and that was by obtaining admission there." She pointed as she spoke to the sick-room. "And in one only character was that to be obtained. I had attended classes, and seen something of nursing, and when it became necessary for Mrs. Joliffe to go away for change, the doctor was only too glad to avail himself of my father's recommendation of me. There is no blame attaching to him in the matter. He had no reason to suspect any motive in the recommendation but such as was straightforward and even benevolent."

"Nobody blamed him," Miss Dunscombe said shortly. "He was simply the last man in the world to see anything he was not intended to see."

"That is how it happened," Mary said in conclusion. "I came a fortnight ago, and before I had been here a week I knew—putting together the fragments which escaped him in his ravings—all the miserable story of that night's work. Much of it he has told me himself in his

sleep. His mind seems clearer then than when he is awake, and he will talk to you and answer you as though he were. I have sat there and listened night after night, until I thought at times I could not bear the horror of it any longer. Surely you cannot refuse us the poor justice of doing it this once?"

"Tell me what he says—what motive he ascribes to himself," Miss Dunscombe asked hoarsely, evading the question.

"He must have wanted money," was the reply, "and it sounds as though he had been tempted by the sight of it. Why did he bring it to him? Why did he show it to him? That is the refrain of it all. And then he raves about his wife and the baby, and their all being turned out into the street; and sometimes," lowering her voice, "he seems to be going through it all—catching him up, struggling with him, and then he will start up with a scream, and tell you he is not dead—that he is only stunned, and that it is too dark to see him. It is more dreadful than you can imagine to hear him."

"But it is not always that; there must be other things in his mind—other things he wanders about; and you sent word he talked of me, and of Steenie."

"There has scarcely been a night," Mary Hamilton replied, "that he has not fancied you were here watching him. It is to you, if anybody, he has been endeavouring, in his delirium, to explain and defend himself. Sometimes he is calmer, thinking you understand him; sometimes he gets beside himself with pain and fear, pleading with you—for it must be for you he takes me—all that he has done and means to do for Steenie. And oh, Miss Dunscombe, though I don't know, and can only guess, what tempted him, and how it all happened, and though I cannot doubt it was he who did the deed, and though, too, for my father's sake, I cannot hold my peace, and let you go on doubting it—still, in spite of all of it, I do not believe—I shall never believe—he meant murder. Robbery—oh yes, but not murder!"

As she stood with clasped hands, her eyes flashing through the tears which her own earnestness had called into them, the soft colour in her cheeks deepened into carmine, all the unselfish pity her words bespoke alive in her face, a sudden flood of tenderness—such tenderness as had been

buried for years in her sister's grave—swept, so to say, over Margaret Dunscombe, and broke down in a moment the long-standing barriers of distrust and reserve.

"God bless you!" she exclaimed brokenly, as she held her arms out to the girl standing before her, and took her into them. "You are a noble girl, and for Steenie's sake you must forgive me. God knows I have suffered more than you all."

There is very little more to be said. Of the details of the crime, which had so nearly blighted so many lives, nothing was ever known save from the delirious ravings of the man who had committed it. It was not permitted to Richard Bevan to confess or to receive absolution at the hands of mortal. No glimmer of reason returned to him before he died, and his secret, so far as the world at large was concerned, went down to the grave with him; Nellie Stansfeld, spared for her own innocent sake all knowledge of it, carrying away with her to her new home, amongst her husband's people, the light heart of her youth.

For the mystery of the glove, which was destined to be the cause of so much misunderstanding, and to one person, at least, so much misery, the conjecture hazarded by Mary Hamilton, when she first heard the story, affords the only likely explanation. In all human probability, dropped by Colonel Hamilton in the lawyer's office, during his friend's interview with the latter, earlier in the day, it was accidentally picked up and appropriated by Mr. Ellerton himself, when he paid that visit to it, which doubtless occupied the half-hour, never to be accounted for, between his departure from the railway-station and his arrival at the club, on the last day of his life.

It was many a long day before the Colonel forgave himself for the ordeal through which he had suffered his daughter to pass, and not until he saw her her old self again could he bring himself to accept with any cordiality the olive-branch extended to him—Heaven only knows with what heartfelt contrition!—by his old love.

The shadow which had so long been permitted to darken the lives of those two, was the last cloud on the horizon of the young lives which were so dear to both of them, and it was lifted for ever on the day which gave Mary Hamilton to her husband's arms.

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EUNICE KINNAIRD.

CHAPTER I.

"I THINK that was a good sermon, Eunice."

"It was a beautiful sermon," I answer enthusiastically.

"I meant it to tell; I put my whole heart into it," uncle says, turning his worn face towards my eager young one.

"Every bit of it was beautiful," I say with eager evasion, for I would not let Uncle James know that the ticking of the round clock in front of the gallery, the heavy bobbing and buzzing of a bumble-bee against the window-panes, and the scents of mown hay and clover-blossoms stealing through the open doors, were all part of the day-dream into which his voice wove itself somnolently.

"That is the best of a good thought; it acquires a new beauty through utterance," uncle goes on with innocent faith in my sympathy and comprehension. "You polish it, and turn it this way and that way in your study; but in the pulpit, with the people listening, it acquires a separate life of its own, and appeals to yourself as well as your audience."

"But your whole life appeals," I answer with hearty irrelevance. "Why, uncle, you don't need to preach, so long as people can see how you live."

We are on our way home from service, and it is a beautiful, bright, sunshiny Sabbath, with scarcely a cloud in the grey-

blue sky. The treeless landscape is at its fairest, for the meadows and waysides are alive with blossoms. Over the dusty roads, stretching to right and left of the bare bleak church, the worshippers are straggling slowly, their footsteps raising faint clouds of dust as they pass. Now and then a bonnet nods to another bonnet, or a head-shake emphasises a criticism, but no sound of living voice reaches us, for the Sabbath involves the decorum of whispered talk on the way home from service.

The little stream of men and women has spent ten minutes over its exit from the square whitewashed building, and now forms itself into groups of two and three which move soberly forward; uncle, who has delayed to divest himself of gown and bands, and I, who have waited for him, bringing up the rear. Twenty yards ahead of us, aunt, with her long gown caught up at one side, and dipping into the dust at every step on the other, and her Paisley shawl pinned close to her throat, despite the warmth of the atmosphere, is progressing slowly, because half-a-dozen of her active offspring are circling round her and impeding her progress—they alone of all the neighbourhood caring not a fig for the nearness of the minister or the sanctity of the day.

There are eight of them, eight lusty boys and girls who call uncle, father; and there are two of us, his nieces, Nellie and I, aged fifteen and eighteen, with as high spirits and as healthy appetites as belong to our

years; and there are uncle and aunt, and all the small dignity of their position to be supported on his poor income. It was more than pitiful—it was cruel, and the helplessness and hopelessness of his poverty were killing him by inches, though it was only very recently that this had been borne in on me.

The minister and his wife had been in their best circumstances when they adopted us soon after their marriage, but even if their burden had been as heavy as it afterwards became, I am quite sure they would have acted just the same. We had no tie of kinship to anyone but them, as far as they knew, and our good, easy father, with his artistic temperament and costly tastes and innate certainty of living as long as other people, had not thought of making any provision for us, and so we came to the manse when he died, and continued there, as a matter of course.

Aunt and uncle met their later fate as differently as might have been anticipated from their character. Aunt grew dull and indifferent; let the children develop according to nature, without restraining or educating efforts on her part; and fell into ways of depressing narration, showing from her own experience the uselessness of virtue and religion. In uncle's case it seemed as if the current of his earthly hopes, having been rudely checked, had set steadily towards holy things. I never saw his worn face lifted above the faded pulpit-cushion without looking round to see if its spirituality did not reflect itself on some bucolic countenance near me.

But on the Sabbath in question I was not thinking of the sermon, for a plan of enriching the family coffers had taken shape, and, for the moment, filled my entire imagination. Naturally the plan never came to anything, for I had no education and no experience that extended beyond the manse and its surroundings; but it has always been the prerogative of youth to soar above the barriers of the possible. That was how it happened that, in all loyalty to uncle, I had not listened to a word he said.

June is the sweetest month of the year in a country as sparsely wooded as ours. What did it matter that the hills showed their bare sides on either hand, and that the houses, dotted here and there through the cup of the valley, stood out assertively, without any picturesque drapery of foliage to hide their defects, when every ditch was rich with long grasses and waving ferns,

every hedge glowing with the dog-rose, and every meadow pied with daisies and the starry blossoms of the dandelion?

Uncle and I talk little as we walk home together. He is tired, and I know that, and the flaming gorse and lazily drifting clouds, and birds that carol from every bush, afford us both companionship enough. Uncle and I understand each other's moods, and, no doubt, that is why we are such thorough friends.

Presently, after a long silence, we hear a step striding swiftly over the dusty road behind us.

"Is it you, Hugh?"

Uncle turns in a little surprise, and offers his hand to the new comer with paternal cordiality.

"Yes; I have been following you."

He shakes hands with me too, in a shy, constrained way, and his face is flushed.

"I am going away to-morrow, and I wished to say good-bye."

His chest rises with a half sigh as he speaks, though his eyes are very bright and fearless.

He is a tall young man and dark, with a slim, sinewy figure, and a refined, ugly face. When I say ugly, I mean that there is not one classic feature in the face from brow to chin, but the eyes are very keen and frank, and the mouth is grave and sweet.

"And you think you are doing wisely?" uncle asks with his sad, reflective smile.

"Yes, I think so. To do anything great one must get among great possibilities. Here I need not starve, but then one has higher ambitions than to eat and not perish when one is young."

"True."

Uncle's head droops a little. He has had ambitions too, but he does not damp the young fellow's courage by reminding him of these, and of their result.

"And what are your plans?" he asks after a moment's silence.

"I have not told that to anyone yet. I don't mean to tell it, lest it should bring bad luck. I think we can bear disappointment better when no one knows how much we have essayed. But I may say this, that I mean to study."

"To study!"

I look up at him with a sudden access of interest.

"Yes; that is why I am going to Glasgow, where education and living are cheap. I shall get work there, and, when I can afford it, I shall take the classes, and perhaps some

day I shall come back to visit you a full-fledged doctor."

He laughs a little, but his voice is husky.

"I hope with all my heart you may succeed," uncle says fervently.

He knows when to speak and when to be silent, and so he does not add what doubtless is in his own heart, that a profession is not a goal, but a starting-point; that you may attain to that, and yet recognise sorrowfully afterwards that you are a failure.

"And how long will all that take?" I ask, with youth's impatience for immediate results.

"Six years, or more; and I am twenty-one now. It's a pity, is it not?" looking at me wistfully.

"A great pity. And then there is all the trouble in between. Now, if you could only go to sleep, and awake and find yourself finished!"

"I should not wish that. Things are better worth having when you must contend to get them. And, as to work, life is work when it is worthy of the name."

"And very profitless work, for the most part," I answer.

And then I drop behind to make selections from the wild-flowers along the way, and to wish that I were a man like Hugh Forrester, with some possibility before me to strive for.

We stop at last by the manse-gate.

"You will dine with us, won't you, Hugh?" uncle says with his ready hospitality.

"Thank you, I should like to stay, but they will expect me at home; and besides——"

"Oh, they will know where you are, and Mrs. Kinnaird will be very grieved if you turn away from our door."

So he comes in with a certain reluctant gladness, and aunt welcomes him cordially enough.

In books poverty is always made graceful somehow, and so it ought to be when authors are poets; but in real life I have never observed its charm. Our poverty was ugly in every detail; even the children, with their ill-fitting clothes and bad manners, seemed only a feature of the general impecuniosity. Uncle had grown accustomed to the small, over-filled dining-room, to the defective table appointments, and to the general bad behaviour of his offspring; but the presence of even such an uncritical guest as Hugh Forrester seemed to make

him realise everything that day with painful keenness. There was a rare flush on his cheeks as he helped the salt-beef and cabbages on to the chipped plates, and his sharp rebuke to Teddy for drumming on the table with the bowl of his spoon reduced that young gentleman to noisy tears.

But the dreariest things are got over at last; the pudding was eaten, grace was said, and then the juveniles, with a whoop, departed to sun themselves on the open space before the manse-door, and to fight a little in the process.

Half an hour later Hugh rose to go. Leave-taking has a solemnising effect in a general way, but eleven successive handshakes, under even the most depressing circumstances, become comic.

I was waiting for my turn, twelfth and last, when Hugh said:

"You might walk down the road with me, Eunice, a little way."

Now three things in this remark struck me as being remarkable. First, his wanting my company, we being by no means such close intimates; second, his addressing me as Eunice, a thing he had never done hitherto; and, third, the implied idea that old things were all over, that he was going from us for ever, and that this special fact involved special consequences.

"Oh, if you like," I said gravely, and went out with him, bareheaded as I was.

The time of primroses was over, but in shady places the hyacinth hung its head, and the wood-sorrel waved its delicate bells.

In the little wood below the manse a small stream was trickling, making a tiny sound of music as it went, and overhead a lark was singing as it soared upward into the blue distance.

"Is it not a pity that a Sabbath walk is un-Presbyterian?" I said, finding the silence between us irksome. "On a day like this I should like to walk on and on, never turning back, and not thinking anything, but just feeling the bleating of the sheep, and the growing of the grass, and the whisper of the wind across the fields."

"On a day like this I feel as if all things were possible," he said.

"I am sure I hope all good things may be possible," I answer vaguely.

"But I want so much," he goes on with a slight catching of the breath. "I want a great work to do, and skill to do it

with. I want power and happiness, and—you."

"Me!" I echo stupidly.

"Yes, you. Don't you know I love you? Haven't you known it for years and years—oh, Eunice!"

I look up at him with a little petulant scorn and indignation. Of course I expected love to come to me some time, but not such love as this—love that would brighten things and better them, and make life easy and pleasant.

As to Hugh Forrester, with his shabby coat and gloveless hands—Hugh Forrester, a mere bank-clerk, dreaming of scholarship as we dream of heaven, his love was a degradation.

"I haven't known anything of the sort, and if I had I should have been very angry," I answer wrathfully. "You to love me, indeed!" drawing myself up with ludicrous importance. "Oh, believe me, I have quite other plans in view than marrying—so! If I ever do marry—and perhaps I never shall—it will be somebody—well, somebody quite different," I conclude lamely.

"This is all new to you, you have never thought about me—how could you?" he goes on with wistful patience. "But, Eunice, I love you, have loved you always; whatever I may do or be will be owing to you somehow, and I want you to think, if I had succeeded, if I were a marked man in a small circle, and if I came to you then and offered you myself and anything I had attained, would you care for me?"

"What is the good of talking like a goose?" I asked with infinite contempt. "Do something before you begin to dream of what you may do. But as to caring for you, that is entirely another matter. Fancy looking ten years ahead—why, you would be over thirty then!" breaking into a derisive laugh.

"Yes, it is a long time, and perhaps I have been wrong to speak; but it seemed as if I could not go away without saying something to you of all I feel. And it is hopeless, you say?"

"Quite hopeless."

I shook hands with him decorously, with a little pride that he was so pale (I think there is nothing equal to the cruelty of ignorance and youth), and then I walked away from him, till I turned the corner that shut me from his sight, after which I started to run, and hurried back to the house as quickly as my narrow gown and country-made boots would permit me.

CHAPTER II.

"EUNICE, come here." Uncle opened the door of our big, chill, rarely-occupied drawing-room, which, with its faded carpet, and stiff ornaments, and quaint needlework, was the one piece of reserved gentility that the house boasted.

It was May Eve, the May of a year succeeding that on which Hugh Forrester had left us, and twilight was melting into night, but the country-side was ablaze for all that, with the fitful flame of gorse, ignited by the country lads in ignorant pursuance of some far-off Druidic rite. From hill-top to hill-top flame answered flame, and black figures circled with sounds of laughter in the yellow light, while the sickle of the young moon bent its silver bow above the scene.

I had been out on the ascent behind the manse alone, watching the lights rise here and there, and grow to columns of flame, and then die into darkness. I liked to be alone with Nature at night when I could; the far-off gleam of the tremulous stars, the timid sounds that came softly through the distance, soothed me like perfect music. But it was only on May Eve that solitary nocturnal ramblings were permissible, the good spirits being afoot that night for the guarding of unprotected maids. In the darkness of my descent the little servant from the manse had darted past me, only turning to nod a smiling good-night. Speech was impossible to her then, because she held hugged to her heart the little root of "yarrow" which "before that time the morrow," if she observed the conditions of the spell religiously, and forbore to utter a sound, would tell her who her true love should be.

Poor, silly little Janet! I looked after her with faint contempt. On such a night how could she practise incantations or believe in lovers?

"Eunice, come here."

With my hat in my hand, and my shawl trailing from my arm, I entered the drawing-room, and saw, seated at the centre-table, in the unusual light of a pair of wax-candles, a tall, slim man with greyish hair, a long nose slightly bent to one side, and a pair of keen eyes.

"Eunice, this is your uncle Claude."

The arm holding my shawl dropped suddenly.

"Your uncle Claude Duchesney, your mother's brother," Uncle James continued explanatorily.

The stranger did not rise to greet me, and he made no affectionate movement towards me; he only sat looking me over in his sharp, appraising way.

"You never heard of him?" Uncle James went on, "because your mother made a *mésalliance*, and offended her friends. But the Duchesneys are great people. This gentleman is an Indian civil servant, home now for two years' leave—coming to visit you has been one of his earliest acts after his arrival."

I try to answer something, but the words stick in my throat. All at once I realise that I am a great, gawky, country girl, dull, and ignorant, and that the gentleman in front of me thinks so.

"I came to see if anything could be done," the stranger says in his clear, cold voice. "I don't believe in endless animosities; I wanted to see Helen's children, and find out what possibilities were in them. Now that I have seen you both," he indicated with a slight wave of his hand Nellie sitting silently in the background, "I think the best thing would be a little education."

"I should like to go to school, only that I am so old. I know nothing," I broke in bluntly.

Uncle James's face fell.

"It is well you feel that; that is a step in the right direction." The stranger stuck the eyeglass, which hitherto he had been swinging, into his eye, and stared at me. "Well, you shall go to school if you wish it, and afterwards, if proper clothing makes you ladylike and pretty, I shall take you both to India."

Then for the first time the meaning of his proposal dawned on me.

"I could not leave uncle, and the manse, and the children," I said with a start. "I love them all. Oh, I could not give them up!"

"As long as you reside in this country you could come here at intervals, of course," Uncle Claude said slowly, "but afterwards—well, India is far off, and your life there would likely unfit you for the manse."

"Mr. Duchesney wishes to take you all to himself, to sever you from old friends, and teach you to despise them, and he has been good enough to offer to pay me for your maintenance hitherto."

Uncle James's lip quivers as he speaks, but his head is held erect with dignity. I go over to him involuntarily, and put my arm about his neck.

"I apologise if I have offended," Uncle

Claude murmurs, with a thin veil of scorn over his courtesy. "Many men would not have resented a proposal made in all good faith. These are my sister's children, and I have no doubt they were often a trouble and expense to you."

"They are my brother's daughters too," Uncle James answers, trembling a little. "Anything in my power was done for them gladly, out of pure love for them and their father. You can provide for them now; if they choose to go with you, I am willing."

"But I do not choose," I answer with a sob. "I want no friend but you, no home but the manse, and if I am ignorant and stupid, what does it matter?" brushing away a tear as I spoke.

"You must not form such a grave decision in a moment," Uncle James says, his hand tightening on mine. "This is a question affecting your whole future, you must think it well over. Mr. Duchesney will give you time."

"I shall give you a week," Uncle Claude rises as he speaks. "I go back to town to-night; this day week I shall come for your answer."

He gives uncle his finger-tips, extends the same to me, which I feign, with clumsy discourtesy, not to see, pats Nellie on the cheek, and goes away, stepping jauntily.

"Oh, Eunice, isn't it like a book?"

Nellie has repressed her raptures till she is alone with me, but in the stillness of the room which we share with the sleeping three-year-old baby, her delight breaks forth.

"What is there like a book in that icicle offering us what we don't mean to take?" I ask gruffly.

"Not take it? That is good. I assure you I shall take it with all my heart. Why, he'll send us to school in London, perhaps, and take us to India, and we might marry rajahs and become begums—who knows? And think of the fine clothes, and the company, and everything! Oh, Eunice, I'm only afraid of waking up and finding it a dream."

"You are an empty, heartless little thing," I say contemptuously, and fall to brushing my hair furiously.

"No more heartless than you are," Nellie answers severely. "You think it a fine thing to stop at home with Uncle James, who can't afford to keep us. I don't. I think the sensible and kind thing is to take ourselves off his hands when we

have a chance, and afterwards, when we are rich and prosperous, do something to repay him for all his trouble."

Nellie coils herself up in bed with a strong conviction of her own wisdom, and I put out the candle and cry myself to sleep in the darkness.

Of course we went with Uncle Claude. Common-sense demanded that course, which aunt urged, and which uncle only faintly negatived, and which our intended benefactor had taken for granted from the beginning. But I went away with the feeling that my affections twined round every stick and stone about the manse, and that my upheaval had killed me.

"I shall come back—I shall come back!" I sobbed, leaning from the window of the railway-carriage, and holding Uncle James's hand, even after the huge machine was in motion; "and if I am ever able to be of any use in the world, ever able to be anything but a burden on you, I shall come to live with you, and we shall never part."

"God bless you, Eunice!" he whispered huskily.

Those were the last words I ever heard from his lips. It was early summer then; before Christmas came round, the flat tombstone to the east of the church had been moved to make way for all that was mortal of the purest saint I ever knew, and the manse was left vacant for strangers.

It was a fashionable seminary we went to, where, owing to my age, we were made parlour-boarders, who paid extra, and we were allowed no holidays, the educational process being continued during the vacations, and after Uncle James's death I did not care.

Aunt had taken a cottage about ten miles from her old home, and except for her one irreparable loss, she was no worse off than she had been. The Church yielded her the annuity allowed to the widows of ministers, and an insurance company paid her a small sum, amassed Heaven knew by what efforts and ingenuity, and Uncle Claude most kindly added an income that, with their simple tastes and few requirements, removed all dread from the future. As to our days, their sum was narrowed down to acquiring a smattering of many things, and making the best of ourselves on Uncle Claude's periodical visits. I think he was pleased with our progress, for he bought us fine things unlimitedly, and introduced us, by-

and-by, to his friends, and seemed pleased to take us, pranked out magnificently, to stalls at the play. But for all that we did not go to India, somewhat to Nellie's indignation, and the simple reason was that uncle got married, and ceased to want us. He was over forty, and he had had a disappointment years before, so that he had decided to keep his life empty for ever, but he changed his mind somehow when the occasion came, and the end of it all was that he brought a pretty, soft, motherly girl to the college one day, and introduced her to us as our future aunt. I think I was cordial enough, for I was grateful to uncle, and glad that he should be happy, but my warmth was nothing by the side of Nellie's tropic fervour. She literally gushed over the pair, and when they had left cried her eyes out for spite.

For my part, I could not say I was deeply grieved; the prospect of Eastern life had never allured me much, and if uncle abandoned us now it was fortunate that we could do something for ourselves.

But uncle had no thought of abandoning us. He came next day, and unfolded his plans to us, with the shy constraint of an elderly bachelor about to marry. Charlotte, his future bride, was pleased with us both, and would willingly take us to India, if we cared to go, and chaperon us there, and do her best for us. Failing that, he would make arrangements for us at home, and settle a trim little income on us, for our sole use and pleasure.

Either alternative was pleasant enough: of course we should have enjoyed tropic luxury and importance; but, on the other hand, entire and moneyed independence at home was not without its charm. How we might have decided is still doubtful, had not one of my uncle's friends unexpectedly proposed to my pretty little sister, and, to my utter amazement, found her entirely willing.

He was elderly, he was yellow, he had a bad liver, and a bad temper to boot; but he had an estate in Surrey, and a town house, and a stud of horses, and a box at the Opera, and so my sweet seventeen-year-old little sister discovered that she could love him.

CHAPTER III.

"MAY I speak with you a little, Nellie?"

"Yes, certainly, by-and-by."

My sister answers absently, for she is busy filling up invitation-cards to one of her pleasant receptions.

She looks a very bright, pretty, contented matron as she sits in her fresh morning-gown by the writing-table. A little timepiece is ticking busily opposite her, and she glances at it now and again, for Nellie loves to think that her hours are valuable, and that she apportions them with business-like precision.

"There are about fifty more to address." She looks up at me doubtfully as she speaks. "I should ask you to help me, but you would be sure to make mistakes."

"Of course I should. I'd mix up the envelopes, and ask bachelors to bring their families, and benedicts to come without their wives," I admit despondently.

Nellie goes on writing, and I look at her with a little envy, added to my never-failing sense of wonder. How is it that Nellie is so perfectly happy? Have her deserts been greater or her demands in life fewer than those of other people? And shall I ever by any change of circumstances attain to like contentment?

"There now, that is done." Nelly stamps her letters with a sigh of relief, rings for the footman to take them away, and then turns to me.

"I think your party will be very pleasant," I say with polite evasion.

"There is no knowing before the replies are in; but I don't suppose you have waited half an hour to tell me that."

"No, not exactly." I feel that I am blushing, as her bright eyes scrutinise me, and now that a decisive moment in my life has come, I shrink from it.

"Then what is it?"

"I have been thinking of leaving Prince's Gate," I say with a quiver in my voice.

Nellie looks at me blankly.

"You and Mr. Baddington have been very kind to me—far too kind," I go on tremulously; "but all the same I have never been happy here. Fashionable life does not suit me; your friends don't care for me; and so I want to go away."

"To go where?"

"Where I shall be needed. I have been here six years, and, with all gratitude to you, I must say the years have been wasted. I am no better, or wiser—indeed, far less so than I was at the manse."

"And whose fault is that?" Nellie asks, with an accent of offence. "I have taken you everywhere, you have met the very nicest people, and you might have been settled in life times and again, had you cared."

"But I did not care, and I think my soul is perishing of the emptiness of your world." The appeal in my voice is pitiful, but it only angers Nellie. She draws herself up stiffly and looks at me. "It is all my own fault," I go on regretfully. "Rich people, and grand people, and fashionable people are as good as others, perhaps better, but I can't understand or reach them; and so I want to get away to other conditions and other surroundings."

"And where will you seek your Utopia?"

"I shall go to Aunt Letty."

Nellie looks at me incredulously.

"To Aunt Letty, with her eight children, and her common house in a common street! Very well, Eunice, if you wish that, I need not try to reason with you."

She glances round at all the graceful appointments of her tasteful room, and shrugs her shoulders slightly. My bad taste is incomprehensible.

"I am leaving the better for the worse, I know;" there is a little break in my voice as I speak; "but odd people are happier in odd surroundings, and I always wanted to do something, to be of use."

"And how do you mean to benefit Aunt Letty?"

"I am not very rich, but still I can be of service among poorer people. There are children to educate, and I have a little money."

"But so little—far less than I spend on my dress."

"Yes, but the needs there will be so different; and do you not think that we grow through sacrifice?"

Nellie sets this question aside as irrelevant. "Then you have made up your mind?" she says.

"Yes, but I have not arranged anything. I am to visit aunt next week, you know, and then we shall form our plans."

"But are you sure she will want you?"

I look at Nellie with a tremulous smile.

"No, I am not sure of anything; I know I am a woman apart, as helpless as some unshelled soft creature, and as perverse as though I were of adamant. But that is my misfortune, Nellie, and Uncle James used to love me. I have been thinking his children would love me too."

"I should not reckon on it," Nellie says with terse matter-of-factness. "Remember how long you have been away from them, and all the diversity in your lives."

"I shall make allowances; there is no getting on unless you make allowances," I

say. "But, in any case, I shall not return permanently to Prince's Gate."

"My dear Eunice, this is quite a pleasure—quite a pleasure, indeed!" My aunt has come out to the cab-door, and has embraced me in the slack way peculiar to lymphatic people; and after my long and toilsome journey I stand on the doorstep with a troubled consciousness of surprise and dismay. I had not expected much, but I certainly had looked forward to some one meeting me at the station of this unknown town, and to some semblance of rejoicing being made at my approach. But I have arrived unwelcomed, have jogged alone through the deadlively thoroughfare, and now aunt, in the limpest of dresses and dingiest of caps, is greeting me, without any circle of eager young faces making a background behind her.

"You are all well, I hope?" I repress a little chill determinedly.

"Quite well, thank you, Eunice dear. Indeed, we never have had any complaints to make regarding health since you saw us."

"Then where are the young people; did they not know I was coming?"

"Oh, of course they knew. Indeed, I don't know where they are. I think Teddy and Dick are here," opening the parlour-door as she speaks.

Two clumsy boys rise reluctantly from the hair-cloth sofa as we enter, and extend me an unwilling hand.

"Dick was the baby when we parted."

Not to be daunted in my friendliness, I draw them towards me, and turn their reluctant faces to the light.

"They are not like uncle," I say disappointedly.

"No; the boys take after my side of the house."

"And the girls?"

"I don't know about Letty; she is the third, you remember; but Edith and Lily are Kinnairds, and pretty girls, though I say it. Edith used to be quite a father's daughter—all for books and fine thoughts. I hardly knew what to make of her once, but she is engaged now."

"And that will cure her of the fine thoughts," I say with sorrowful irony.

"Well, yes; she is growing useful now, quite a housekeeper, for practice, you know."

"And whom is she to marry?"

"A young man from the bank, near our

old home; you remember the bank Hugh Forrester belonged to?"

"Yes." I release my two unwilling captives, whom I have been holding hitherto. "Have you heard anything of Hugh lately?"

"I have heard that he is quite a great man—a specialist, he calls himself. He has lived abroad for years studying, and I have heard people say that he will make his mark."

"You have not seen him since—since he went away?"

"No, there is nothing to bring anyone back here."

"Do you know if he is married?"

"I never heard, but most likely he is. I hope he is happy anyway. He was always a favourite of mine."

Aunt goes out to fetch in the brown earthenware teapot for afternoon-tea, and we help ourselves amicably, and then I ask for my remaining cousins.

"Sam and David are at a cricket-match, and Edith took Letty with her when she went out shopping a little while ago. Lily is having her music-lesson now, she has it at the same hour every day, otherwise I think she would have been to meet you."

"Is Lily fond of music?"

"Pretty well, but she is training for a governess; not that I like it much, but what can you do when a girl is self-willed?"

"Oh, nothing, and she is quite right," I answer vaguely. And then the door opens and a tall girl comes in with a roll of music under her arm.

"It's my cousin Eunice, I am sure." She draws her cotton gloves off as she speaks, and then comes up and kisses me warmly. "It was horrid that no one met you, but the boys would not go, and I could not. You must have thought very badly of us."

"Oh no, not at all, I knew it was only a mischance." And then I kiss her with all my heart in the caress. "You are uncle's beautiful, gracious child anyhow, be the others what they may," I say to myself.

"What do you think of her, Edith?" I am in my own room many hours later when this question reaches me with startling directness through the closed door, which a wardrobe hides, but by no means renders sound-proof.

"She has uncommonly good clothes."

"I think it was very cool of her to take all that big bedroom to herself, just as a matter of course. She might have had me

to sleep with her quite well," pursues the aggrieved Letty. "Fancy turning Lily out to sleep with mamma, and never caring a bit."

"Oh, how was she to know we had no spare bedroom? Don't be such a goose, Letty."

"I wonder how long she is going to stay. Not very long, I hope."

"I hope not too. It would be a bore having her always in the drawing-room when Tom is here."

"She might have brought us some presents, might she not? I think she is shabby."

"Oh, Letty, do not shout so. If she should hear us!"

"I wonder how old she is!"

"Pretty old, I should say. Sam is older than I am, and her married sister is ever so much older than Sam, and she is older still."

"Then I suppose she is an old maid?"

"Yes, I suppose so; but, dressed as she is, age does not matter so very much."

The wardrobe door creaks a little as I close it, for I had been putting away my travelling things when the colloquy commenced, and now I turn away with a little heart-sickness, having heard as many unpalatable things as generally fall to the lot of eavesdroppers. Uncle's children had not any tender feelings towards me; therefore, life amongst them would not be the haven I had dreamed of.

I lay awake far into the night, thinking sadly of many things. What was there about me that rendered me a pariah? Why did no one ever tend towards me with the form of love that I desired?

Small sorrows loom very largely when one is lying awake meditating, and listening to the clock slowly chiming hour after hour. I would have sold my future happiness for the certainty of a very small good as I lay pondering during that darkest period that precedes the dawn. But next morning, when Lily's bright, refined face looked in at the door, to ask me how I had rested, and if I cared to get up, a sudden resolve leaped into being.

"Come here," I said impulsively. "I want to know if you would care to let me educate you. We shall go abroad together, and you shall have the best masters money can procure. I am rich and independent, and nobody needs me or cares for me. There, don't answer now. Talk it over with your mother, and let me know at your leisure how you decide."

CHAPTER IV.

FRAULEIN WEITLING'S boarding establishment, Number Ten, Gräfin Platz, Berlin, was eminently respectable, for a variety of reasons. It was on the ground-floor, when ordinary establishments of a like nature were three, four, five storeys high; it was in a retired locality, remote from noisy thoroughfares and the vulgar traffic due to trade; the Rathhaus was only a few doors off, and the Dom Kirche over the way. Further, its inmates were all of the gentler sex, while less genteel establishments actually harboured men.

Fraülein Weitling could accommodate eight ladies with board and residence, and eight invariably sheltered beneath her hospitable roof, for what so needful to unprotected femininity as an odour of respectability in its surroundings?

It was a compliment to her eight boarders that Fraülein Weitling considered them as respectable as her establishment, but perhaps her estimate awarded them only bare justice, for they were all modestly moneyed, and that is respectable; they paid their bills with alacrity, and that is respectable; they attended church regularly, and that is respectable. Finally, they were all spinsters. Need further proof of their respectability be adduced?

Fraülein Weitling's attractive little circular promised her boarders cheerful intellectual society in her comfortable home, and they found it—among themselves, for they assembled daily in a common parlour, took their refectations at a common table, and discussed gossip, politics, or religion, quite openly, and sparred among themselves mildly or fiercely according to temperament and the latest atmospheric influence. But each rode her particular hobby and aired her particular theory, and if that does not render society cheerful, what does?

They lived together very contentedly, these well-to-do women who were growing old. No doubt each life had its own history of desire and disappointment, of ambition and despair; but that was all ended now, and the future would be uneventful like the present. But what did that matter when rooms were comfortable and meals regular, and when merry music could be heard at any time for a groschen or two? The boarders, who had learned what living signified, took things as they came, and never thought of grieving.

Lily and I were a perpetual mild interest

at Number Ten, Gräfin Platz. We were with the boarders, but not of them. We were foreigners, we were only temporary residents, and we were young. Young!—save the mark, with ten good years yawning drearily between us. But in the eyes of fifty and sixty no doubt nine-and-twenty seems a period of gay juvenility.

It was three years since I had left England with Lily Kinnaird, and my life with Fräulein Weitling had been very happy. My peculiarities were left in peace, simply because no one noticed them, and Lily loved me, and her progress made life interesting. Her evenings and the night were always spent with me; her days were devoted to classes in a great school Unter den Linden. Lily was studying for the state diploma. When she had attained that we should return to our own country, ready for any fortune.

Lily always spoke of teaching, and I did not discourage her, for a plan of life relieves the days of that vague uncertainty which often renders existence so burdensome to women. But of course I had my own private opinion. It was not likely she would grow old in teaching, since there were men with eyes in the world. Lily would marry, as was right and fitting. Since I had lived in Number Ten, Gräfin Platz, celibacy had ceased to seem a necessity, and had assumed the aspect of a penalty entailed on perverse natures. Lily would marry, of course; but, meantime, it would do her no harm to be ready to struggle for elbow-room among the world's working people.

"Cousin Eunice, you have spoiled Lily."

I had been lingering over my breakfast in the dingy little apartment of the Kinnaird household, termed by courtesy the dining-room, in a mood of new and rare contentment that had come to me in recent days, when my brisk and impertinent little cousin, the Letty of earlier memories, broke in on my self-gratulation abruptly.

"Spoiled Lily! My dear child, what do you mean?"

"You have made her far too grand for us, and yet she is not any better than I can see. She is idle, and she turns up her nose at people who know less than she does, and she won't eat the food that is good enough for mother and me, and when our friends—excellent people whom she has known all her life—call to see her, she is as languid and grand as if their visit could not possibly be meant for her."

"Oh, my dear Letty, I am sure you are quite mistaken; I am sure——" But I stop confusedly, for Lily's real and conscious superiority to her surroundings has made itself patent even to my not too acute perceptions.

"You are sure that what I say is right, and so it is, and mother has noticed it too, though she would not speak out. But I can't hold my tongue about what I feel, and so I just want to know what you think about Lily."

"I think she is a dear and lovely girl."

"Oh, that is all very fine; so was Edith, so am I, too, for the matter of that; but I don't think being lovely is a career, and I should like to find out what we are to do with Lily, and her airs, and her education, and her dresses. She is far above us, and she isn't going to teach now, for when I asked her about it, she told me not to bother."

"Well, I do think, Letty, it was very unkind of you to ask her such a question, as though you wanted her out of the house," I answer indignantly. "She is your sister, and a great credit to you, and I would request you not to sit in judgment on her, but just leave her in my hands."

"I dare say you will keep her; but is it a nice thing for a girl to be in that position because she is lazy? You undertook to educate her, and I suppose you consider that ended now; and yet what can she do? She can't make her own dresses; she does not know how anything is cooked; and as to teaching, you only think she can do it, for you don't know."

There was a certain amount of truth in this, which, however, I was not disposed to admit, so I looked at my practical, blunt-featured, prettily-tinted little cousin severely, and answered loftily and evasively that she did not know what she was talking about.

Letty nodded her head with thorough comprehension of me and my subterfuges, shut her firm little mouth, like one who has said her say, and will leave it to carry conviction of itself, asked me politely if I had finished breakfast, and then rang for the maid-of-all-work to clear away the things.

It was more than three months since the April morning when Lily and I had left Berlin. Then my life had seemed to me all cut and dried and ended, while a long vista of fair possibilities fronted her. Now, after a gay season

under Nellie's roof, Lily had learned to think any life she might live certain to be dull and commonplace—while I? Well, Heaven be praised! I was not so old or ugly as I might have been.

Perhaps it had been thoughtless to introduce Lily into a rich household, and show her how full and complete existence might be rendered; to expose her to all Nellie's habitual matchmaking; to let her be fêted and caressed for three months, and then to plunge her suddenly into her own homely household, and say, "Your life is here." But it was only for a time, though she did not know that, nor could I tell it to anyone yet, but by-and-by she would have with me as perfect a life as I could offer her.

My story was not ended yet; no doubt I had known that deep down in my heart always; no doubt I had remained young, waiting for the sequel. I wonder had I loved him unconfessed from the hour he said "Farewell," or did my love leap into existence when I saw him in the strength of his matured manhood—in the pride of his achieved ambition? I think I loved him always; I think the thought of his purposeful life made me weary and impatient of other men.

He was one of Nellie's guests; he was the great oculist of whom all England had heard, and he was Hugh Forrester, the man who had tried to woo me beneath the shadow of the pines.

He had never forgotten me; he came daily to Prince's Gate after he found me there, and thenceforward my laggard life was set to music. I never had a doubt of the nature of his feelings towards me. He was not a man to change, and if he had grown indifferent, why should he make occasions in his busy life to find us out and talk to us of old times? And why should he have given me the history of all his struggles, unless he still remembered that he had called me the motive power of all his future? Oh, the blooming time of my heart had been late in coming, but I was proud of the perfection of the tardy blossom I could offer him.

"I shall go and see you in the north soon," he had said as he saw us off from Euston. He brought us each flowers at parting, and the fragrance of my crimson roses was like a message to me through the long dusty journey.

Lily found a tuft of blue forget-me-nots nestling at the very heart of hers, and picked it out and fastened it at her throat

with girlish coquetry. She liked him, as I was sure all young girls would, and he and she would be rare friends by-and-by.

Things had altered a good deal with aunt since we parted—altered and improved. Edith was married and off her hands, two of the boys were self-supporting, and more, bringing their mite periodically to the lean domestic purse, while Letty, the matter-of-fact Letty, undertook the household management, and really wrought wonders. There was a certain method in all the arrangements now, and the poor old house, if shabby, was scrupulously bright and tidy.

To me life here was far more interesting than in Nellie's magnificent establishment. The interests were more human, the heart-needs fewer, and the efforts farther-reaching and more varied.

"Perhaps I shall come to live with you by-and-by," I said once to aunt tentatively.

"Oh, you will marry!" She looked at me inquisitively, smiling a little.

"Women of thirty don't often marry," I said, blushing hotly.

"No, and maybe it is better for them. There is sorrow in life either way," sighing.

But I could not think so. I was like an untried girl in my passionate acceptance of this one thing.

He was coming north for me, to tell me he loved me still, and to put right the blunder I had made twelve years ago. He had said so, and I was very patient. Having waited so long I could wait still, but the days dragged a little, though I sang about the house, and wore fresh flowers always, and took a woman's pleasure in being fair. Hitherto it had not mattered, but since he cared—

Oh, how much I should have to tell him, and how much to ask! And how much he would have to tell me of the labours of his long toilsome years! What perfect confidence there would be between us, what thorough comprehension! Oh, these late loves are best! They may have missed the freshness of spring, but they also escape its risks, its drenching showers, its sudden frosts, and all the changes that sometimes kill.

I had been thinking all this as I walked down the dull little street that led to Lavender Terrace. Sometimes the limits of the dingy rooms were too narrow to contain me and my happiness, and then I went out and walked away towards the

sunset, with the triumphant step of a conqueror.

"Mr. Forrester is here, Cousin Eunice."

Letty, in a trim little apron and trim little shoes, had opened the door herself, and now stood inside the hall looking at me.

"Is he?"

How glad I was that I stood with my back to the light, and that she could not read my changing face.

"Yes, he has been here an hour. Lily received him, as mamma was not dressed, but now she is with him too."

For an instant I was tempted to go to him there and then; but I knew I was too tremulous, too exultant, and the others would notice that. So I went upstairs instead, and put aside my outdoor things, and made myself as beautiful as I knew how, and then stood before the mirror smiling dreamily. Oh, that I could meet him alone, if that were possible!

And even as I so thought a light step came flying along the corridor, the door was burst open, and Lily stood on the threshold.

"Oh, Eunice, he has come!"

"I know it, my darling."

"And, Eunice—oh, Eunice, he loves me!"

I have a kind of idea that I sat down here, and that she came to me and knelt beside me, and hid her face on my shoulder.

"I would not let myself think it," she went on; "but all the time I hoped it might be possible. Do you know what it is to hope for a thing with all your soul, and to feel it for ever beyond your reach?"

"Yes, I know."

"And at times I have been so jealous—jealous of you, my own Eunice, who have given me all the poor powers I possess. But he says it is years since he thought of you. Oh, Eunice, you will forgive me for asking. He says you were the love of his boyhood, but he was nothing to you, and so he strove to forget you."

"He was very wise."

"But you were the very root of his ambition years ago, he says, and any triumph he has ever achieved traces its source to you."

"You and he have been talking foolishly."

"We had so much to say, it will take years before we are through it all. It seemed we had only said a few things when mamma came in, and then I fled off to tell you."

"It was very good of you."

"Oh no; but for you I should never have been fit to be his wife; but for you, in all probability I should never have seen him. You have made us both what we are, and given us to each other."

"I always wanted to be a little Providence to uncle's children," I said with a dreary laugh.

"You are not vexed, are you?" striving to see my face in the darkness.

"Certainly not."

"And you will like Hugh—you will be a friend to both of us. You don't know how he esteems and likes you."

"I am very fortunate in that."

"And you will live with us, won't you? You would be happier than with Nellie."

"Don't you think it is too soon to talk of these things?"

"Oh no; for he is asking mamma to give me to him now. He says his life is half over, and he has no time to waste."

"That is true; he is older than I am."

"But he does not look it, Eunice."

So my poor little delusion of youthfulness went down with all the rest.

Hugh and Lily were married a week ago, and I go back to Fräulein Weitling's, as permanent resident, to-morrow.

A LITTLE AVERSION.

CHAPTER I.

It was a morning in early spring, yet it might well have been mid-winter. Snow lay thickly everywhere. Town and country fared alike, with only this difference, that the pure, unsullied white of the stretching fields and hedgerows of the latter was in the former represented by dingy house-tops and chocolate-coloured streets. The razor-like east wind that swept our tight little island from coast to coast was, it may be, a trifle keener as it came swooping round street-corners, than in the more open country; but that was about all.

On that same March morning, and at one and the self-same hour, two people stood looking out, safe sheltered, upon the wintry scene. They were a young man and a young woman. Both were good-looking, well-made, and, one would have added, happy. But a glance at either face was sufficient to dispel that illusion. Moodiness,

discontent, anger, were as plainly written upon the one face as the other. But with all this the wintry weather that reigned without had nothing to do. I doubt if either so much as noticed it. Shall I tell you what it really was? Well, then, it was this. With the young girl it was the thought of the young man; with the young man it was the thought of the young girl. Yet they stood this morning separated by scores of miles, and had been separated by thousands; had never so much as met or looked on one another's faces. But the time had come when they had got to meet, to look on one another's faces, to know each other, and, what is more, to try not to hate one another. So, for this, and all that it entails, moody faces, mutual frowns, hearts in hot rebellion.

But there is more to be learnt. Let us take the young man first.

The window at which he stands, idly drumming on the pane, is one of two in a dismal room in a dismal hotel in a still more dismal street leading down from the Strand towards the river. Now and then he stops his tuneless tattoo to take his watch from his waistcoat-pocket, evidently, as he also listens to every footstep on the stairs, in expectation of a visitor. But the footsteps come and go, and have nothing to do with him. Presently, however, there are footsteps which do not pass on, but stop there, and a hand is on the panel.

"Come in!" he says sharply, and a dingy waiter, entering, holds out a dingy hand, in which there is a card, and says:

"Gent to see you, sir."

There is no need of the card to tell the young man who his visitor is. W. J. Lincoln, solicitor, Bowerdale, Yorkshire, is the only man who could possibly want to see him, Anthony Norris, of Shanghai, to-day. Another moment, and his visitor had him by the hand, and was bidding him welcome to England. He was a man considerably past middle-age, plain, almost ugly-looking, yet no one thought him so after the first five minutes of their acquaintance. It was the first friendly face, the first friendly voice, the younger man had met since his landing, and he returned the warm hand-pressure gratefully.

"Well," cried the lawyer, rubbing an obtrusively large nose to warm it, "and how are you? Frozen—eh? Couldn't have come into worse weather if you had come at Christmas."

"Well, yes, I suppose it is rather cold.

I haven't been warm since I landed, now you mention it. But I have had other things to think of, you see."

"Pleasant ones, I hope. They should be, you know—should be."

"Scarcely," said the young man grimly.

"No! You surprise me! A young lady to think about, and a very charming young lady, let me tell you; a fine estate into the bargain too! Dear me, what wouldn't I give to be in your shoes!"

"And I," cried Anthony Norris, "I wish I had never come back at all. I should not have done so, but that my plans for a year's absence were already made when your letter reached me. And what is more, I wish I had never saved the old madman's life at all. I wish with all my heart I had let him drown—there!"

"Dear me, dear me!" cried Mr. Lincoln, rubbing his big nose quite viciously, "this is very sad! Why, you are as bad as my friend, Miss Beatrix, herself."

"Eh!" said young Norris, stopping short.

Mr. Lincoln gave a little cough.

"Yes, she is quite as hot about it as you can be. She has a will of her own, I assure you."

"I hate a woman with a will of her own."

Mr. Lincoln gave another little cough. Anthony looked at him sharply, then laughed for the first time.

"Come, that is better," said the lawyer cheerfully. "And now let us see if we can't get to the bright side of all this. In the first place let us run over the facts of the case—a very peculiar one, I admit. A client of mine in a will—which, by the way, I did not make—leaves his estate, personal property, everything, in fact, of which he dies possessed, in this wise: Firstly, all to go to his natural heiress and granddaughter, provided, that is, she marries a certain young man, an utter stranger to her, who chanced to save his life some five years ago—in Malta, I believe."

Young Norris gave a groan of acquiescence.

"In the event of the young lady declining to carry out this arrangement, both parties are to receive the sum of ten thousand pounds. In the event of the young man declining, the young lady's ten thousand becomes twenty thousand, while the young man receives but five thousand. Should both parties prove refractory, each receives the original ten thousand, and no

more, the remainder of the estate going to certain charities. "Stop a bit," the lawyer went on, seeing his companion about to speak; "the terms of the will are these: That you and Miss Thornhill shall spend at least six months of the twelve now before us in one another's society at Braybrooke Court or elsewhere. Furthermore, that the final decision be not made by either party before the expiration of the first six months—though necessarily before the entire twelve be expired."

"Was there ever such a madman?" cried the young man. "Why, if he wanted us to hate one another—to cut one another's throats, he could not have gone more cleverly to work. But I throw the whole affair up—I will have nothing to do with it."

"My dear sir," said Mr. Lincoln quietly, "don't you think that is treating a young lady, and a very charming young lady, as I have said, and one who has certainly as much to complain of as yourself, rather cavalierly? Do you expect me to go back and tell her you decline even to look at her?"

"She would be more grateful, I expect, than even I should be."

"I don't doubt it. Ah, I am not going to flatter you, but later on, when it comes to saying good-bye to the old home—how then? It will be you who will have ousted her, remember. Come, confess she is entitled to some consideration."

Young Norris's dark face flushed a little.

"Don't misjudge me, Mr. Lincoln," he cried. "See how I am placed. If I decline to present myself at Braybrooke Court and to Miss Thornhill, I am an ungracious cur, tender only of my own vanity or self-esteem. If, on the other hand, I agree to do so, the world, and what is more to the point, Miss Thornhill herself, will see in me only a barefaced fortune-hunter, and I had as well—nay, better—have stayed away."

Mr. Lincoln was again rubbing his nose, in perplexity this time. There was no small amount of truth in his young friend's argument, yet he did not mean to be abashed by it.

"The fact is, my dear sir," he said, after a moment's pause, "the whole affair is wrong from beginning to end, and what we have got to do is to make the best we can of it. I say to you what I have already said to Miss Thornhill: give yourselves a chance."

Young Norris could not give in all at once. But at last he spoke, reluctantly enough:

"Well, since it must be——"

"That's right; and now let us be off. You may live to thank your 'old madman' yet."

The younger man shook his head.

"If only I had let him drown!" he muttered.

CHAPTER II.

BUT we have kept the young lady, at all times a somewhat impatient one, waiting long enough. As she stands, eyes flashing, lips pouting, discontent, annoyance, written upon her face, there is no difficulty in recognising in her the object of Mr. Lincoln's Machiavellian policy. She is not companionless. Two ladies, both somewhat beyond middle-age, share with her the warmth and cheerfulness of the morning-room at Braybrooke Court.

The elder of the two, Miss Joanna Duncombe, sister of the late owner of the place, is a tall, thin, spinster lady of a placid and somewhat unmeaning countenance; the other, a plump, comfortable-looking body, with a shrewd, yet kindly face, is Mrs. Lincoln.

"If only," the girl is saying, "I were a sparrow, or a starling, or," as something that looked more like a blue, wind-swept blossom than a bird, came fluttering down on the snow outside, "a tom-tit, I could not be expected to marry a hateful young man from Shanghai. Oh, my grandfather must have been mad when he made that will!"

"No, no, my dear," said Miss Joanna mildly. "I remember the day my poor brother made it, perfectly. We were in London, it was very hot, and he called me a fool. He was never more sensible in his life."

"Well," exclaimed the young lady at the window, turning sharply round, "I was never more sensible in my life, and I tell you this, Aunt Joanna, and you too, Mrs. Lincoln: nothing will induce me to carry out that will. The young man from Shanghai may come here and make the place intolerable for the next six months. I will try to be civil to him, but if he so much as breathes a word of love or marriage, I will leave the Court and him—and Aunt Jo may marry him. And now," she went on, with a sudden change in her voice, "I am going for a ten-mile walk. Perhaps I may come back in a better temper; if I don't, I pity everybody."

And with a laugh and a kiss from her finger-tips to the two ladies by the fire, Miss Beatrix Thornhill disappeared.

When, many hours later, my heroine entered the "little drawing-room" at the Court, dressed for dinner, and looking as distractingly charming as a wilful, high-spirited young lady of more than ordinary personal attractions can look, she found the lawyer and his charge just arrived and in possession of the fire. As he introduced the two young people, Mr. Lincoln glanced with curious, observant eyes, to which a sly twinkle had stolen, from one to the other.

He saw just what he had expected. The young lady, her colour slightly heightened—it might be by her wintry walk—cool, collected, studiously polite; the gentleman flushed, awkward, and angrily anxious to escape.

Mr. Lincoln watched the little scene a moment or two longer, and then took pity on his victim.

"Come," he said, "let me show you to your room. Miss Thornhill will excuse us."

Five minutes later he was back again.

"Well," he cried, rubbing his nose, "and what do you think of our friend from—what's the name of the place?"

"I think," said Miss Thornhill decidedly, "he had better have stayed there."

"Ha, ha!" laughed the lawyer, and he rubbed his nose more vigorously still. "That is exactly what he says, ex—actly. We are getting on famously."

Whatever the nature of Miss Thornhill's slumbers may have been that night, Anthony Norris knew little of either sleep or forgetfulness. He was by nature neither a coward nor a pessimist, and having accepted his position, he told himself there only remained to face it with as much dignity as was possible to him. The mysterious and masculine process known as pulling oneself together may be a thing of moments, may be of hours. In Anthony Norris's case it was certainly the latter.

The cold, grey, March dawn found him but just sinking into sleep and forgetfulness. When Beatrix Thornhill went forward to greet her guest next morning, she looked, or thought she looked, upon another man.

The figure rather below than above the middle height, and to which she had in her own mind taken exception the night before, seemed to have gained in height and dignity. The dark eyes gazed steadily into hers. There was no trace of awkwardness, no sign of being at a disadvantage in

voice or manner. In a word, she found herself met with a coolness and self-possession that equalled her own. Of course she hated him still, and yet she longed to pat him on the shoulder, and cry "Bravo!"

CHAPTER III.

THE town of Bowerdale, in whose principal street Mr. Lincoln's house and office were to be found, was distant some three miles only from Braybrooke, consequently easily to be reached by him when at the Court. On this particular morning the lawyer countermanded the dog-cart, and bore his young hostess off to the library.

"Now," he said, placing her in an easy-chair by the fire and drawing up another for himself, "it is no use deferring things. We have got this young man—the question is, What are we to do with him? He has few connections in England, none to whom he needs at present present himself. We may, therefore, consider that the play is begun. Have you any suggestion to make in his behalf or your own? As soon as the weather is anything like decent, he can find occupation and amusement enough. In the meantime——"

"In the meantime I make him a present of the billiard-room and stables; I will promise never to go near either."

"Well, yes, that might reconcile him," said Mr. Lincoln thoughtfully.

Miss Thornhill's pretty little nose, quivered ever so little; ever so little a pout came to the laughing lips.

"You don't think anything of the kind," she cried.

"Don't I? Well, we shall see. Now, if you were only—but it can't be helped."

"What can't be helped?"

"Why, you see, the fact is this young fellow naturally has his ideal, as, of course, we all of us have." Mr. Lincoln paused to rub his nose; a little flush stole to his young companion's face. "Now, if only you were small, yellow-haired, blue-eyed, and that sort of thing, you know! But there, as I have said, it can't be helped."

"Helped! why, I wouldn't be like that for the world!"

"No, no, of course not; still——"

"I wonder where he is!" the girl interrupted him suddenly, rising and crossing to the nearest window. "I suppose I may as well take him for a walk. Ah, how cold it looks! It won't kill him, will it, after that broiling place of his?"

"I should hardly think so," said the lawyer gravely, opening the door for her.

Five minutes later, Miss Thornhill and her guest were stepping briskly down the straight, snow-covered drive.

"It's a good three miles into Bowerdale, I must tell you," the young lady was saying; "I hope you can walk so far."

"Thank you," said Anthony gravely; "I walk occasionally, I assure you, and," he added with a smile, "work too."

"Do you?" said Miss Thornhill. "I thought in those dreadfully hot places people only slept, and drank things."

Young Norris laughed outright.

"I hope I don't look quite that sort of man."

The girl eyed the well-knit figure at her side, then gave one steady, questioning glance at the keen, sunburnt face.

"No," she said frankly, "I don't think you do."

Anthony raised his hat. Beatrix gave a little rippling laugh.

"Ah, I see you are very like other people, after all."

"Of course I am. What did you expect me to be like?" he asked quickly.

"I expected you to wear turned-up shoes and a pigtail, and——" She paused.

"And what?" he said, eagerly bending his dark eyes on hers.

"Oh, nothing else in particular. I suppose you do something out there besides work and walk?" she went on somewhat irrelevantly.

"Yes, we play occasionally."

"Dancing, tennis, and so on?"

"Yes, we are even civilised enough for tennis and dancing, when we can get any-one to dance with."

"Ah, you have not many ladies—not young ones, I suppose. Tell me about them," said Miss Thornhill with sudden interest. "Are they very nice? Who is the prettiest? What is she like? Tell me all about them."

"Of course they are very nice," her companion answered, laughing. "As to who is the prettiest, I suppose that is a matter of taste."

"But your taste."

"Supposing I have none?"

"Supposing nothing of the kind. Listen: Young lady, name unknown, small, fair, golden-haired, blue-eyed——"

"Stay!" cried Anthony, reddening. "How do you know? Who told you?"

Beatrix only nodded her head mysteriously. At this moment the dog-cart from the Court came whirling past. Mr. Lincoln merely shook his whip at the

young people as he passed, but he was smiling in a very satisfied and contented manner as he did so. Was the smile too well satisfied, too content to please Miss Thornhill? I cannot say; I only know that after this the walk was scarcely such a success. The young lady's previous affability gave place to a decided chilliness under which the young man, naturally, also froze and stiffened. The two drew farther apart with each step. As they neared their destination they had almost the road between them. Conversation necessarily languished. It was in all but silence that Beatrix piloted her companion through the little town. At the Lincoln's door she turned to leave him.

"No, I am not coming in," she said.

"Mr. Lincoln will give you some luncheon and a seat in the dog-cart back." She was going to say "home," but checked herself.

"And where shall we find you?" Anthony asked, frigid as herself.

"Please be good enough to say I am gone on to the Turners';" and before he had time to lift his hat, the young man found himself alone on the lawyer's doorstep.

I am afraid Mr. Lincoln scarcely found his guest as bright and companionable as he had expected to do. Miss Thornhill was evidently a tabooed subject, as was also the walk that had promised so well in her company. But I hardly think the astute practitioner was altogether at a loss to account for the unlooked-for turn affairs had evidently taken. He knew his wilful favourite and all her ways by heart, and could make a tolerably correct guess as to what had happened. But never a word spoke he. He only—the silent meal being over—brought out a box of his best cigars and the morning paper, bidding his guest make himself happy, and look out for the dog-cart in a couple of hours' time.

The couple of hours seemed to Anthony more like a couple of days, but the dog-cart, followed by his host, appeared at last. Of course Miss Thornhill's message had been duly given.

The Turners' house—an old-fashioned one standing in the midst of good, old-fashioned gardens—was just outside the town. As Mr. Lincoln drove there he rubbed his nose a good deal with the silver handle of his whip. His eyes, too, were twinkling, as if the frost had got into them. At the big gates the groom jumped down, and was about to open them. Mr. Lincoln put up his hand.

"I think, John," he said slowly, his eyes twinkling more than ever, "you shall just run in and ask if Miss Thornhill is still here."

In less than a minute the man was back again.

"Miss Thornhill left about a quarter of an hour ago, sir. She is walking home, I think."

"Dear me," said the lawyer; "but we shall catch her up."

A touch of the whip and they were rattling off again. Not much to be seen ahead. A cart, a man with a couple of dogs; farther on an old woman with a bundle. For the next quarter of a mile nothing at all, then cart number two, and then, stepping briskly along, a figure, tall, slender, fur-wrapped.

"How well she walks!" said the lawyer in genuine admiration. The young man by his side said nothing.

Presently they had caught her up. Miss Thornhill lifted a laughing face.

"Don't stop, for your life," she cried, and waved her muff at them.

The next moment they had dashed past her. Young Norris expressed no surprise, asked no questions. He drew around him the rug which he had partially thrown off in readiness to descend, than sat silent, looking straight before him for the rest of the drive.

The next day Mr. Lincoln, by Miss Thornhill's request, installed the guest in the library.

"You are to look upon the room as yours," he explained. "You say you have a lot of writing and reading to do; do it here. No one will disturb you—not even our friend and hostess, Miss Beatrix."

"No, I can well believe any spot in which I might chance to be would be quite safe from Miss Thornhill's presence," Anthony replied a little bitterly.

"You mistrust one another too much. If you would only try to think of each other as host and guest, and nothing more."

"Impossible," said Anthony hotly; "the fact is, she sees in me only the cold-blooded wooer of her estate and fortune."

"Humph!" said the lawyer.

"You cannot doubt it."

"She is a woman, therefore to be wooed."

"By me—never!"

"She is a woman——" But I won't quote the rest," said Mr. Lincoln. "So good-morning. I will tell Miss Bee when

she wants you she will know where to find you."

Mr. Lincoln was not quite so light at heart as he professed to be. Mrs. Lincoln, as I need scarcely say, shared his anxieties, and took her part in the difficult task of inducing two people, who were determined to hate, to love one another. Miss Thornhill naturally fell to her lot. She spoke her mind freely. She finessed, with this result: Beatrix listened with politeness to all she had to say, kissed her, laughed at her, and went her own way.

Perhaps it was not really such a very dreadful way, after all, if only the young man had been a little less sensitive. It is true she froze when he was disposed to thaw, remembered when he appeared to have forgotten. But, on the other hand, there were times when she, too, would be off her guard, when even she seemed, for the time, to have forgotten, and something almost like friendship would be established between them. And then would "come a frost, a killing frost," and even Mr. Lincoln would go about despondently, rubbing his nose till it presented a warmth and cheerfulness his heart was far from knowing.

And all this time Anthony Norris had the big library to himself, and should have got through a lot of work, for no one, unless it was Mr. Lincoln, ever came there.

The frost and snow had long departed. April had come with balmy airs, budding leaves, and spring blossoms. Violets flung their sweet scent abroad; primroses, scarcely less fragrant, studded bank and hedgerow.

It was a delicious morning, early in the month. Anthony Norris, a cigarette between his lips, had made the round of stables and hothouses, strolled as far as the lodge-gates, and was back again, busy over letters in the room where no one ever came to disturb him, and where, to tell the truth, a pair of dark brown eyes, now wistful, now laughter-filled, would sometimes haunt him till the loneliness would become all but unendurable. But this April morning something wonderful was to happen. As Anthony sat bending over his writing in one of the windows, a light footstep came down the passage, a girl's voice, softly singing, drew nearer with each step. The young man heard it; his pen ceased to travel over the paper. Voice and footstep stopped. A moment—the door was thrown unhesi-

tatingly open. Still he did not stir. The intruder was now half-way across the room. Then he turned.

"I beg your pardon," said Miss Thornhill with a little start; "I had no idea you were here."

"Or you would not have come," said Anthony, rising.

"Quite so. I did not know what to do with all these primroses and violets, so bethought me of your table. Will you have some?"

"Thank you. Yet," Anthony hesitated, "perhaps it is scarcely worth while."

"Certainly not," said Beatrix hastily, drawing back the flowers.

"I was going to say that I have a letter this morning calling me at once to London, so that unfortunately their sweetness, if not wasted on the desert air, will at least be lost to me. Unless, that is," he added, dropping his voice, "you will be good enough to give me a few of the violets."

"Take as many as you like." And Beatrix once more offered him the basket.

"That would not be the same thing at all," said Anthony, laughing.

"They would at least smell as sweet, I suppose," said Beatrix gravely as she handed him the flowers.

"Scarcely, I think," Anthony answered, carefully arranging the little knot of blue in his coat. "There, I shall not take them out until I return."

"Then I hope you will not be away very long."

"Thank you."

"Oh, I was only thinking how dead the poor things would be!"

"Thank you," said Anthony again.

Miss Thornhill moved towards the window by which her companion had been seated, and looked out.

"And when are we to see you back?"

"Oh, you are only getting rid of me for two or three days, unless——"

"Unless what?"

"Unless you would prefer my remaining away longer, or, indeed, not returning at all."

"I think," replied Beatrix quietly, and with her eyes still fixed on the scene outside, "that you are aware there is no question of preference in the matter for either of us."

Young Norris drew a step nearer.

"Miss Thornhill," he cried, his voice trembling a little, "will you let me say a word on this subject? I have never done so yet; it has been thought better it should

be avoided between us. But I want you to do me the justice to believe that I can scarcely be a more unwelcome, than I am an unwilling, guest. I only ask you for your own sake to put up with my presence until the time comes that shall set us both free. Much, I am aware, you must lose by my most unfortunate but innocent crossing of your path, but anything in my power—anything open to me to do——" He hesitated.

"Short of making me your wife?" laughed Beatrix.

Anthony coloured, but said nothing.

"Let us hope," she went on gaily, "we shall neither of us be reduced to such extremities. Come, give me your hand; I freely forgive you what you certainly could not help. You see I can be generous. The thousands that should have been mine I can let go without a pang. For the old place," the brown eyes moistened, "I confess it is not so easy. Still——"

"Still," said Anthony softly, "it is preferable to the other alternative. And now," he added with a smile, and gathering up his letters, "as we quite understand one another, perhaps we may meet again better friends. Good-bye."

"Good-bye, and au revoir; and, Mr. Norris——"

"Yes?" he said, coming back.

"I am sure Aunt Jo will miss you."

Beatrix stood a moment listening to Anthony Norris's retreating footsteps, then she made her way to a little mirror that hung between two of the long French-windows. She stood looking into it thoughtfully for the space of two or three minutes; then she shook her head at the bright, piquante, wilful face reflected there.

"No," she cried, apostrophising it, "you certainly are not ugly, my dear; it can't be that. Perhaps your temper is too bad. You like your own way, you know," with another nod and a flash of the brown eyes. "Still, if even Braybrooke Court, and goodness knows how much a year, can't make you even tolerable, you must, I am afraid, be what Cousin Charlie calls 'a poor lot.' Dear old Charlie! I shall just sit down and write to him, and say he must come at once if he doesn't want me to die of combined bad temper and the young man from Shanghai."

The impetuous mistress of the Court was not long over her letter. She dashed at it, as indeed she did at most things, not using two words where one would do.

There it was in its envelope, addressed and ready for the post; and then—then somehow Miss Thornhill appeared to find time hang somewhat heavily on her hands. Why, I cannot tell. I only know it was so. But I also know that had you ventured to hint that so it was, she would have contradicted you flatly. It scarcely could be the absence of the departed guest, for in the morning they rarely met. Yet in the afternoon she sent back her horse after ordering it to the door, declared her intention of not going out at all, and was eventually picked up by Mr. Lincoln and the dog-cart just outside Bowerdale.

Aunt Joanna really missed the young man, as her niece had assured him she would do, and loudly, if somewhat incoherently, bewailed him at every turn. But she met with no expression of sympathy, from Beatrix at least.

"Dear me, Aunt Jo," cried the girl as she threw herself into her chair in the drawing-room after dinner; "now I have been thinking what a comfort it was to be to ourselves again. Don't you find it so, Mrs. Lincoln?"

"Certainly, my dear. Not that there is really anything objectionable about Mr. Norris. Of course he has seen very little of society—of ladies, I suppose, nothing at all. Still, as you say—"

"Good gracious! my dear Mrs. Lincoln, what did I say?" cried Beatrix hotly. "I am sure I never said he had lived among savages, as you seem to fancy he has done."

"No, my dear. Well, I dare say you are right."

"Not that it signifies," said Beatrix, fanning herself with a screen.

"Not a bit," assented Mrs. Lincoln.

"We are talking of that poor young Norris," explained Miss Duncombe, as Mr. Lincoln came into the room. "We all miss him dreadfully; though why Bee there should say not, and I'm sure if chopsticks or anything of that sort, perhaps he misses them, you know, and we should have got used to them in time, though how my poor dear brother, who had been nearly all his life at sea, could go and all but drown himself as he did—" The rest of Miss Duncombe's wanderings was lost in the stocking she was knitting.

Mr. Lincoln came towards the fire, rubbing his hands.

"Why, there is my friend Miss Bee actually yawning, and only eight o'clock. Come, Miss Bee, what do you say to a game of chess? You are dying of ennui."

"I am dying," laughed Beatrix, "for some one to quarrel with."

"Good, very good," said the lawyer, administering a gentle rub to his nose.

"I don't see it," said his opponent, between a smile and pout.

"No," said Mr. Lincoln gravely; "and yet 'tis big enough."

CHAPTER IV.

WHEN Charlie Duncombe, obedient to orders, and nothing loth, arrived at the Court, he found himself greeted with such smiles and welcome as did not always fall even to his share.

"Why, Bee," cried the broad-shouldered, fair-bearded young Yorkshireman bluntly, "you must be glad to see me! Is the Chinaman so awfully heavy in hand?"

Bee gave her pretty head a little toss.

"If you mean Mr. Anthony Norris, sir, he is not at all heavy in hand, as you call it. In fact, he is not at hand at all, for he happens to be still in London."

"Then I wish he would keep there."

Beatrix's eyes flashed mischievously; she gave a little yawn.

"If you only knew how dull it is without him!"

Charlie Duncombe's fair face crimsoned ever so little. He drew nearer to where Beatrix was standing.

"Bee," he said wistfully, "you have never got to care for the fellow?"

Then Bee laughed outright.

"Oh, you absurd boy!" she cried, "don't you know we hate one another, and that he is gone to London just to get out of your charming cousin Bee's way?"

"Nonsense!" cried the young man stoutly, "I don't believe anything of the sort. And if it was so, what should he come running back here for, I should like to know?"

"To see Aunt Jo," said Beatrix demurely.

"Nonsense!" cried Charlie again.

"Is it? Very well. Wait and see."

Charlie Duncombe did wait, some fortnight at least, but he certainly did not see. He did not so much as get a glance at "the young man from Shanghai," of whom he knew just as much as the outside world, and nothing more. The "lucky fellow" had saved the old admiral's life, and been remembered accordingly. To make him welcome at the Court under the circumstances was all very right and proper, but the fellow ought to know when to go, and

in Cousin Charlie's opinion the time was come. As for Miss Thornhill's opinion, although he made no secret of his own, there was no arriving at it. She would contradict herself, and him, a dozen times a day. In the meantime there she was, his to ride with, walk with, talk with, and quarrel with, and he tried to be content. Sometimes he would look at his companion and wonder if she was half so much so. She should have been. Each morning at breakfast no one was brighter; no one less interested in Mr. Lincoln's communication from "our friend Norris," and certainly no one smiled more contentedly when the lawyer almost daily announced his deferred return. But a morning came when Mr. Lincoln, gathering up his letters, breakfast over, laid a finger upon his young hostess's arm.

"Give me a minute in the library," he said. "It is only a letter from young Norris," he explained as he closed the library-door behind them. "Nothing very interesting, only the Shanghai people are sending him to Lyons; business for the firm, of course, so we shall not see him back just yet. I am writing this morning; I suppose I may tell him not to hurry? He may as well take a run while he is about it. I dare say he finds us rather quiet folks down here." And the lawyer brushed an imaginary fly from off his nose.

"No doubt," Miss Thornhill assented.

"Pray beg him not to hurry."

"By the way, of course he sends polite messages, apologies, and all that sort of thing."

"Oh, of course," said Beatrix, carefully examining one of the pens upon the writing-table.

"But you are thinking of writing yourself?"

"I!" she cried, hastily dropping the pen.

"No! Well, I may give him a message of some kind, I suppose? We must be polite, too, you know."

"Mr. Lincoln," said Beatrix hurriedly, "don't you think there are times when truth is preferable even to politeness?"

Her cheeks burned, her breath came in little gasps. Mr. Lincoln looked at her a moment almost wistfully.

"No, I don't," he said boldly, and, with a wave of his hand, was gone.

That morning Miss Thornhill announced her intention of proceeding, with no further delay than was positively necessary, to London for a few weeks. Aunt Jo was, of

course, to accompany her. Cousin Charlie might see them safely on their journey. On their return he was to hold himself pledged to reappear at the Court—as were also the Lincolns.

"To help with the Chinaman, I suppose," he grumbled, as Beatrix reminded him of his promise the morning of his departure, which was indeed the morning after their arrival in town. He could not resist a parting-shot. But contrary to expectation, it appeared to bring nothing down.

"He appears to take a deal of looking after." Shot number two.

Beatrix looked up.

"Don't you think," she said quietly, "that it is just possible Mr. Norris may be quite capable of looking after himself?"

"I don't doubt it!" he retorted. And then Cousin Charlie told himself he had done it this time. She did not blaze out at him in her old, hot, whimsical way that he knew so well, that, after all, meant so little. Her face was very white, her lips trembled a little, she spoke very quietly, and yet he found himself repeating, "that he had done it this time."

"You don't know what you are talking about," she said, "and I—I may not set you right. What is there about me that I cannot make you understand the man wants none of me nor my possessions? Even if he did not care for another, as he does, I tell you that he would not look at me," she was speaking hotly enough now. A crimson flush dyed cheek and brow; something terribly like tears were in her eyes.

Charlie Duncombe stood aghast. What had he done? He knew nothing, and yet he knew enough—too much.

"Good-bye, Bee," he said at last, not daring to look in her face. "I shall be ready to come to you whenever I am wanted. And," a mist came into the honest blue eyes, "remember, dear, that I have always loved you—always."

He stooped down to the hot, shame-flushed face, kissed it, and was gone.

CHAPTER V.

As the young Yorkshireman turned his back on the big city he detested, and set his honest face towards the moorland breezes that he loved, he told himself he should never be happy again. And so he no doubt believed. Yet by the time the looked-for summons to the Court came, he was, thanks possibly to those same moorland breezes, feeling something of his old

lighthearted self, and was prepared to face even the "young man from Shanghai" with a fair amount of equanimity.

In London, meantime, the season was at its height, and our two country ladies were soon in quite a whirl of gaiety. Some of the old county neighbours heard of their arrival, and Miss Thornhill found herself taken here, there, everywhere. London got hotter and dustier every day. Miss Duncombe began to wonder in a feeble way what it would be like if it got any hotter or any dustier. Budgets of home news came almost daily from Mrs. Lincoln, but there was apparently nothing in their contents to hasten the two ladies' return.

But at length the morning came when, suddenly and without a note of warning, the young mistress of the Court sounded the recall.

"If you have had quite enough of all this, Aunt Jo," she said calmly, "I think we will be off."

And before Aunt Jo was quite clear in her own mind as to whether it was she or her niece who had done all the dining, dancing, and gaiety in general, and had had enough of it in consequence, she found herself once more seated in her own particular easy-chair at the Court, and dropping stitches in her knitting as comfortably as if she had never left it. Before the week was over, everything, indeed, was going on very much as before for everybody. The Lincolns were back; Cousin Charlie was there; the "young man from Shanghai" was looked for daily. Then came a telegram; he would be at the Court that night.

Charlie Duncombe had gone some thirty miles down the road that morning, and would be returning by the same train. Mr. Lincoln agreed to wait in Bowerdale, meet the two young men with the dog-cart, and bring them home. Miss Duncombe left her easy-chair and her knitting, and became a very bee for the way in which she buzzed about the place, trotting backwards and forwards to "poor dear young Norris's" room to see that all was comfortable, until Beatrix suggested her taking up her abode there for the day, as a saving of wear and tear both to herself and the stair-carpet. But the final visit was paid at last, and Aunt Joanna set herself to listen for the wheels of the returning dog-cart. It was, it is true, some half-hour or more before even the train could be looked for at Bowerdale, but Miss Duncombe's movements were not given to be influenced by

trifles. After many false alarms, carriage-wheels at last were really heard upon the gravel, and Aunt Jo rushed to the hall-windows in time to catch a glimpse of a nondescript vehicle disappearing in the direction of the kitchen and stables. Once more disappointed, the poor lady returned to her chair and knitting.

"Well?" questioned Beatrix.

"Butcher or baker, my dear; I really could not see which."

"Ah, here is Briggs," laughed Bee a minute or two later. "He can tell us— butcher or baker, or——"

She stopped suddenly.

Briggs, a usually florid-complexioned individual, and not given to the holding of his tongue when an eligible opportunity presented itself for wagging it, stood in the doorway, white-faced, open-mouthed, but, as it seemed, unable, or, for the first time in his life, unwilling to speak.

"What is it, Briggs?" cried the three ladies simultaneously.

For answer, Briggs made his way over to Mrs. Lincoln's chair, and whispered something in her ear.

"Excuse me a minute," she said; "a messenger from Mr. Lincoln," and followed the man from the room.

Briggs, stepping softly, led the way to the servants'-hall, where men and maids were gathered, and where the Bowerdale butcher stood the centre of an eager, questioning, yet awe-struck group.

"Now, Mr. Metcalf, if you please," said Briggs, who had recovered his voice.

The men and maids drew back. Mr. Metcalf, who knew Mrs. Lincoln as well as he knew Mr. Briggs himself, touched an imaginary hat-brim.

"It's Lawyer Lincoln as sent me here, ma'am. Fact is there's been a trifle of a accident some twenty mile or so down the road, and the young gentlemen, Mr. Duncombe and t'other, as he was a goin' to meet with the dawg-cart, won't be in just yet. Mr. Lincoln he was afraid as some one might be running over here with the news, and a scarin' of yew ladies unnecessary; so, you see——"

"Yes, yes, I see," interrupted Mrs. Lincoln, feeling quite scared enough as it was. "What about the accident? Any one killed or hurt? What have you heard?"

"Well, you see, ma'am," said Mr. Metcalf, with a little cough, "they keeps these things so precious dark. They don't know nothing! But I did hear——" and

Mr. Metcalf, who was really beginning to enjoy himself, came to a sudden stop, his eyes fixed on something or somebody visible to him over Mrs. Lincoln's shoulder. Mrs. Lincoln turned, as did the rest, and the mistress of the Court came forward. She was very pale, but perfectly self-possessed.

"Go on, if you please," she said, taking her place at Mrs. Lincoln's side. "You were saying——"

"Well, miss, then, since you will have it," said Mr. Metcalf, as a sort of salve to his conscience, and with an alacrity which he the next moment strove to efface and render void by an extra awfulness of tone and manner; "you see they do say as the train your two gentlemen is a travelling by is just smashed to lucifer-matches, and them as isn't killed outright is knocked about orful. But, lor' bless me, I dare say it ain't more 'an half on it true," there was a faint ring of something like regret in his voice; "and you ladies was to be sure and not go a scarin' of yourselves. And, oh, if you please, Mr. Lincoln's love, and he do hope to bring the young gentlemen back safe and sound in time for dinner. And I think, ladies, that's about all."

"Mrs. Lincoln," said Beatrix, as the two retraced their steps across the hall, "will you tell Aunt Joanna what has happened? Just as much as is necessary, nothing more. I am going into the library. If any one should want me, or you should hear anything," with a little shudder, "you will find me there."

Then the lawyer's wife went back to the room which Miss Duncombe had not had the courage to leave. Mr. Metcalf would scarcely have recognised his story as Mrs. Lincoln told it; but even so, it was quite enough to send the colour from poor Aunt Joanna's face, and set her teeth chattering. So the two sat together, scarcely speaking, waiting for they knew not what.

But they had not long to wait. Before the sweet summer day was very much nearer to its close, the dog-cart was at the door. No one had heard it but Mrs. Lincoln. She cast a glance where her companion sat with trembling hands over her knitting, then stole unnoticed from the room. Mr. Lincoln was already in the hall. He was alone, but one glance at his face was sufficient to reassure her.

"Yes, safe and sound, both of them," he said, in answer to the look. "No one, it appears, very much the worse beyond the

fright and shaking. The two are walking up the drive. But where is Bee? Have you been much frightened?"

"Frightened!" echoed Mrs. Lincoln, and then she told how gently the Bowerdale Ariel had done his spiriting.

"And Bee?"

"Poor Bee! She is in the library. She betook herself there at once—to hide her white face, I believe."

At that moment feet were heard outside; another, and the two young men were in the hall. Aunt Jo was there too, shaking hands with both at once, laughing and crying by turns as she did so. But there was no Beatrix. Charlie Duncombe, as the lawyer had done before him, cried:

"Where is Bee?"

Then the lawyer's wife, as she also had done before, told how Beatrix had betaken herself to the library.

"Frightened—eh?" said Charlie. "Afraid to come and look at the pieces. Here we are, Bee," he shouted, as he hurried from the hall, sending his strong young voice down the passage before him as he went, so that Beatrix must have been at once relieved as to the safety and soundness of his lungs at least.

Anthony Norris, meanwhile, stood half stiffly, wholly silently by. Perhaps he was feeling—as we are all more or less at such moments given to feel even in cases of longer acquaintance—that all the acquaintance, all the friendship, had to begin over again. If he felt even something more than this, something of doubt, say, as to his welcome, his reception, it is not very wonderful. But Mr. Lincoln did not give him much time for the indulging in feelings of any kind, pleasant or the reverse.

"Come," he said, "let us show Miss Bee there are no bones broken;" and before the younger man could resist, he found himself being hurried down the long dim passage that had become so familiar to him.

The library door stood open. At the far end of the room was Miss Thornhill. She was seated at the long empty table, her arms were laid upon it, her face was quite hidden in them, nothing but the dark, glossy head was visible. Charlie Duncombe was bending over her, saying something in a low, tender voice. Anthony Norris stepped back. The lawyer put out a detaining hand, but he was too late. As Beatrix raised her head, a figure in the doorway disappeared, hasty footsteps went echoing down the passage.

CHAPTER VI.

ANTHONY NORRIS had been back a week. Visitors were at the Court. If they were supposed to be there with any view to his particular entertainment, they were something of a failure. Charlie Duncombe and Miss Thornhill did the honours of the neighbourhood: arranged rides, drives, picnics, water-parties; but as yet Anthony had found no time, or, it might be, inclination to join in them. Not even the lovely summer days—still less, it seemed, Miss Thornhill—had power to tempt him from the big, somewhat sombre room, where, away from the laughing, idle world by which he was surrounded, he worked, or was supposed to be working, at nobody quite knew what. Of course there were times and seasons when he could not so absent himself, but the bronzed, dark-eyed, rather stern-faced stranger made no particular impression upon anybody, and perhaps faithful Aunt Jo was the only one in all the big, cheerful household who really troubled herself as to him or his doings. I say, "perhaps," because if the mistress of the big house may have been supposed to do so, the young man himself was certainly unconscious of it. He only knew that he had never seen her more smiling, more light-hearted, and that Charles Duncombe was for ever at her elbow. They were together now, strolling side by side about the lawn and gardens.

It was a morning fresh from Paradise. The sun shone, roses bloomed; a light breeze came whispering over the flower-beds and brought their stolen fragrance to Anthony Norris as he stood at the open library-window, watching the unconscious couple. Mr. Lincoln had entered the room, and was now watching him, of which he was himself unconscious until the lawyer's hand was on his shoulder.

"Well," cried Mr. Lincoln cheerfully, "why are you not out among the roses this fine morning like our young friends there? 'Two are company, three none,' is that what you are thinking of?"

Anthony made no answer. He still stood gazing out upon the flowers and sunshine, with the figures of the two young people wandering happily in their midst. But he turned at last.

"I am thinking," he said coldly, "that it is a pity you had not told me my service here was ended."

The lawyer gave a little cough.

"Not quite, my dear sir, I think. She will——"

"Don't talk to me of it," broke in Anthony angrily. "I will have no more to do with it. It has worked mischief enough. For the cursed money, if you are thinking of that, fling it into the nearest ditch; I will never touch a dollar of it."

"No?" said Mr. Lincoln; "that's a pity."

"Pity!" cried the young man; "the only pity is that I should have been kept in ignorance of what has occurred. Knowing what you must have known, why was I not to know it too? Was it necessary I should be brought back to see that?" pointing with his finger. "When I could have gone from this and her you bade me stay. Now it has come to this, there is no choice left me but to go; but," his lips trembled, his voice fell, "I leave my happiness, my life, behind me."

Mr. Lincoln's big nose was buried in his handkerchief, he was blowing upon it a blast long and lusty, a blast that might have been one of emotion or of sympathy, but which, in truth, savoured suspiciously of triumph. What he might have said, with what words have met his companion's reproaches, will never now be known. Miss Thornhill was seen approaching. The next moment, and before Anthony Norris could so much as utter one word of protest, Mr. Lincoln had called to her, and she was hastening towards them.

"Now, my dear," he began as she joined them, "here is our friend, who has something to say to you. He has been telling me all about it, and as I shall only be in the way, I will leave you;" and with treacherous eagerness the wily man of law hurried off to find Miss Duncombe, and prepare her for the instant departure of her favourite for Shanghai.

For the first few minutes the two thus left stood facing one another with never a word between them. Beatrix looked enquiringly, it may be a little anxiously even, at her companion. She was thinking she had never seen him look quite like that before. Whatever it was he had to say, it was evident that he could not find the courage to begin. Was it very strange or wonderful that it should be so? As she stood before him, with all the freshness of the summer's morning about her, the soft flush of summer roses on her cheek, the dewy light and life of all the summer's gladness in her eyes, he told himself he could not speak—such words, that is, as now alone were left to him.

It was Beatrix at last who broke the strange silence.

"Well," she said gently, "what is it, anything very dreadful?"

Then he knew that he could keep silence no longer, that he must speak, must say what he had to say as best he could.

"Dreadful?" he said slowly, echoing her words. "No, I think you will scarcely find it very dreadful. It can scarcely surprise you even. It is only 'Good-bye,' nothing more. I have decided to trouble you no longer."

"Good-bye?" she echoed wonderingly.

"Yes, good-bye," he said. "Do you find it so difficult to believe in your release? And yet," he went on bitterly, "you may well do so, seeing, as you have seen, how even your hate had no power to rid you of me."

"Yes," she interrupted him quickly.

"It is not too strong a word then?" he said sharply; "but why should it be? How could you look on me with anything like toleration even? How see in me anything but the adventurer, the fortune-hunter?"

Beatrix shook her head.

"No?" he said a little eagerly.

"No," she returned, her eyes flashing, "I have had no such thoughts; I have never so wronged you. How could I do so, seeing, as I, too, have seen, you only anxious to avoid me? Knowing, too, how difficult it has been at times for you even to tolerate me; how——"

He stopped her with a movement of his hand.

"You are mistaken," he said quietly. "The difficulty has not been to tolerate you, but"—he paused—"to hate you."

Beatrix made no sign. She stood, her hands clasped tightly together, her eyes, not on him, but gazing out straight before to where the sunshine streamed and the flowers bloomed, careless alike of who came or went, of greetings or farewells.

"So I am going," he went on, finding she did not speak. "Going, not because I hate you, as you seem to think, but because I love you—love you as honestly, as tenderly, as the man you have chosen can ever do. There is no more that I can say. Give me your hand, and let me go while I can find courage to say good-bye, and leave you."

Then Beatrix brought her eyes back to the dark, passionate, longing face.

"Good-bye," she said gently, and put out her hand. He held it lingeringly in his for the space of half a minute; then

let it quickly fall, and without another word was gone. Not quite from the room. At the door Beatrix's voice recalled him.

"Yes?" he said hesitatingly, remembering, it may be, a previous occasion.

"Come back," she said; "there is something I must say—something I must ask you!"

Then he went back to where she stood.

What had come over her since last he looked? What was this face she turned upon him, radiant, smiling, yet tender, wistful?

"Come nearer," she cried softly, then laid a hand lightly on his. "Now tell me, when did you begin—well, not to hate me?"

Anthony could only stand and look at her. Then suddenly, in a flash, he knew what it was. He drew nearer, very much nearer indeed.

"Tell me," he cried impetuously, "when did you first begin to—well, love me?"

After that there was no more pretence between them. Cousin Charlie coming in some ten minutes later found the two laughing over a faded bunch of violets, and the photo of a young lady with yellow hair (which latter Beatrix had come upon that spring morning, weeks ago now). But he did not seem in the least disturbed by the sight. He had the youngest Miss Turner with him, and was, if anything, in better spirits even than usual.

And all this time Mr. Lincoln's dog cart was being driven up and down before the hall-door. Mr. Lincoln himself was on the terrace with Miss Duncombe, who was looking very disturbed indeed.

"Dear me!" she cried, as she took out her watch for about the twentieth time, "that poor dear young man will never get back to Shanghai at this rate!"

And Aunt Joanna was right. He never did.

IN A FLOWER-MARKET.

CHAPTER I.

ITS true name was the "Campo dei Fiori"—the "field of flowers." Turned into literal English, the name has a musical sound, and to people who have a leaning towards things that are poetical, it might suggest something unreal, but as lovely as dreams of the imagination can be.

Instead of this it was a scene of real and most practical life.

The stout Roman women who brought in the loads of freshly-cut vegetables at the

rising of the sun, and who were by no means well content if they were not sold while the day was still very young indeed, never troubled their homely heads about poesy or picturesqueness, or, in fact, with anything beyond the daily work and the daily needs. The men who haggled over their ironmongery, and those who clinked their earthenware pots to show they had the true sound ring in them, were as practical, and as sharp, and as ready to "do" a customer as the dirtiest or the ugliest hawker in the universe.

The flower-girls were different; they did look at each other, so finding a mirror for their own charms, or a foil as the case might be.

The upshot of all was that there was not a much more picturesque sight to be had in Rome than one could have any day by getting up early, and by walking through the cool shady streets to the big old Campo dei Fiori.

Garbage and broken flowers, and littery stalls, and cross vendors, are all non-existent if only you will go early enough. Go early and breathe the fresh clear air, and see the dewy sparkling of the green and flowery things, and forget you are in the midst of a big city.

Hurrying tourists can rarely find time for it, but the happy ones who do not drive post-haste through life see many a lovely and fair sight, and see, too, the real people of a place.

"Lena," said a big woman, with her brown hands on her broad hips, "there is your signorina again. Did you know she was coming? Because you are a little fool if you did. Selling all your flowers as you have done."

"I see her," answered the girl, but she made no sign of being perturbed; her fingers were loosely linked together, and her arms hung loosely down over her woollen apron with the bars of dusky oriental colour woven into it. She wore a purple bodice, and snowy linen was gathered over her shoulders, and hung in full sleeves to her elbows. Above all was a dusky head, a brown face, with features chiselled as clearly as those of an old marble, and about the whole free bearing of her the simple grace and unthinking dignity of a child of the fields and hills.

The woman who had spoken to her was as handsome as a Roman woman of forty can be, but when a black-browed, imperious dame reaches that age, one knows that her charms are of the strong and vigorous

order, and that the softer beauties are departed. Both were peasants, and both had the picturesque aspect that peasants who wear the old peasant dress must have.

"You had no roses for her yesterday. Do you not care?" and the woman pulled the thick folds of woollen stuff which guarded her head from the strengthening sun more forward over her brow. Behind, its fringed ends protected the nape of her neck; a shake of her shoulders arranged these to her satisfaction. "She's got friends with her; she's looking over to Carlotta Moro. Are you content to lose her custom? I've no patience. Where would your father be if I had let customers slip through my fingers in that way?"

"You talk fast, madre mia. Wait a bit. Is it likely that I let the signorina go from me to 'Lotta? Ecco! do I not know why she looks towards 'Lotta? Ha, ha! I know." While saying this, 'Lena had set her back on her mother, and so the words might pass for a soliloquy. However, this was not her reason for turning. Having turned she stooped, and from under an upturned basket she drew forth a huge bunch of roses. Clustering, half wild banksias, sleepy-headed tea-roses, gorgeous crimson blooms; flower-stems and her own brown fingers were shining and dripping with the clear, cool water in which she had kept her treasures fresh. She gave them a little shake, and she wiped her fingers on her handsome apron that was worn for the market. All the while she was looking about her.

"A new signor to-day," was her mother's laconic remark; "truly, the signorina is changeable. But never mind, she makes them all buy. That is good for us."

"Changeable!" echoed the girl. "You think that? Why does she come to us so often, then?"

Her eyes were flashing alternately in two directions. On one side was a group of English people coming along—a party of three, consisting of a short girl, and a tall girl, and a gentleman. One could easily at once catalogue the gentleman as an artist—a young one, one perhaps new in Rome. Away in the opposite direction, behind the aforesaid 'Lotta, was another gentleman, also English—one cannot hide the mark of an Englishman. This one looked about him curiously; at the exact moment we see him he was talking to a guardia—a policeman, as one might say—a being with a cocked hat, and in a uniform of blue and scarlet, and shining appendages.

"Why?" jerked the woman; "why? Why, because she has set her mind on having you in her picture."

"And why not?"

"You say that? You, Elena Cagiati, the child of—of—such as I and your father! Is that your will? Diavolo! but I'll have none of it!"

She suddenly stopped, and, like the changing of a mask, her angry face became one broad smile.

"Signora Cagiati," said the short English girl, "do not say I am not your most faithful customer; I bring you always someone new."

"That is true, signorina; and was I not saying the very same thing to 'Lena here the moment I saw you?"

"You have some roses for me?" The girl had a quick, impulsive way with her. This was to 'Lena, but in a second she turned back to the mother. "I shall make you angry, but you know how much I care for that."

"The signorina could do nothing but make us all happy—has she not done so a thousand times—all the winter?"

"Keep that idea, amica mia!" cried the girl. "And now that the winter has gone, and the spring is here, just give me a pleasure."

"Is it so that the signorina speaks to me?—to Antonia Cagiati, the contadina?" and the big woman lifted her bare arms and bowed her head with a grave grace that was imperial.

"You agree?" cried the girl, by name Adelaide Stewart.

The woman's expression changed to one of deep concern.

"I do not understand," she said.

"Where is your memory?" said the other in the same quick manner.

As she dashed out her words she threw a glance all over the broad space. The sun was pouring in from the east, cutting the shadows of the old houses sharply on the ground; to the rear were the rough carts, and the rougher asses that had drawn them in, with the primitive rope harness dangling about their legs; the stand with flaunting prints and calico looked a very kaleidoscope in the brilliant sunlight, and with the frolicsome lifting of the spring wind, sent the pennons of its gay wares flying hither and thither. One young contadina was bargaining for some huge round earrings from the market jeweller. Behind her was the man who sold the iron-ware, and he was beating a great

copper conca—the water-pot of the country—with an iron rod. Noise would bring custom, he must be thinking. Then came the flower-stalls; the air was full of the scent of blue violets, and of the aromatic perfume of a huge bowlful of white pinks.

Past these pinks came the gentleman who had been talking to the guardia. He wore a black coat and a broad-brimmed, soft felt hat—a cleric.

"Do you come here every morning?" called the English girl as soon as he came within hearing.

Her colour heightened, and her energy became one degree more energetic.

"Do you?" he smiled.

"I have an object."

"And your cousin?"

The tall, fair girl had fallen pale for an instant, but being addressed she too answered with a spice of energy—energy of manner was wholly a thing to be assumed with her:

"Yes, Mr. Ogilvie; the cousin, too, has an object. She had not when she started, but she has now. She is going to buy that conca the man is beating a tattoo on—that is, when Addie can come and talk."

"You are speechless?" asked the gentleman.

"Almost," she said, dropping the energy, and speaking softly. "My Italian is understood by my teacher, but not by the people here."

Then a little flash of merriment came into her grey eyes.

"Their patois is difficult, perhaps?"

"Let me bargain for you, Miss Laura?" said the gentleman. "I know your cousin has her work before her—she will not succeed at once—eh, Benson?"

The young artist shrugged his shoulders. He was a fine young man, artistically got-up in a velvet coat and a hat battered into the due shapelessness of the picturesque. But he was not the ideal artist altogether; his hair was cropped, and his easy toilet was faultless in the care of it.

He was a student—a wealthy student, which adjective must both supply and suggest what we have no space to say about him. A genial, good fellow besides.

"It is a question, I think," and again he shrugged those broad shoulders of his. "There seems a doubt. Shall I go to the rescue?"

Adelaide was talking vehemently and gesticulating.

Benson moved towards her.

"Ask the signor," and the girl's cheeks

were flushed with her struggle. The peasant-woman was holding by her notions.

"The signor paints also?" and Madame Cagiati gathered a handful of peas, and opening one pod after another like so many little pop-guns, shelled them fast into a basin on her stall. Eyes were not wanted for this work, and she used hers in taking stock of this fresh signor.

The young man himself was critically looking at 'Lena. Certainly she had the head that was wanted for the picture in the studio above his. He had his studio on a fourth floor; Adelaide Stewart had hers on the floor over him.

"Yes," he nodded carelessly. Perhaps Marmaduke Benson liked to make much of his careless manner. All his life he had played the genial sovereign. So he lounged easily against the Cagiati stall, and went on: "Yes, I paint, and I find fault with the signorina, and she returns the compliment by picking holes in my canvases."

"And perhaps they deserve it, signor." Pop went a pea-pod, and the woman's black eyes flashed with a carelessness as regal as his own. "If I were the signorina, though, once would be the time you would find fault with me."

"Ha, ha! that is a stroke for me!"

"What makes you angry?" said Adelaide. "If you will not let me have 'Lena, there's an end of it. My picture must go."

"Go to the church steps, signorina." The woman spoke shortly.

"Bah! I can get costumes there; I cannot get 'Lena's face."

"No," and the young man's carelessness was set aside; "no, the signorina has judged rightly. There is but one face which is fit for her picture."

"The face of my girl?"

"Yes. Did no artist ever paint you when you were—"

"A girl? That is as it may have been."

"You will consider?" asked he. "We will come for the answer to-morrow morning."

"I have considered," answered the woman, and a shower of fresh peas leaped out of their pods and skipped gaily over her brown fingers to their companions in the bowl. "I am her mother, I am not her father; and, if you must know, I am not her lover."

Both the girl and he laughed.

"You laugh!" and having said the words her lips shut with a jerk.

"I was a fool," said Benson. Then

he turned neatly a little compliment, said some nonsense about the impossibility of 'Lena's mother having the hardness and the cruelty and the selfishness of a man, be he father or lover. It was the crudest flattery ever heard, but the young man had a pleasant, genial way with him, and his handsome face made the silly words sweet.

The purchase of the conca was just completed, and the two buyers here came up.

Laura was gay and radiant. The excitement, the sweet, fresh morning air, had brought roses to her fair cheeks. She wore a white dress of some soft material, and though its warm woolliness kept her safe from the treachery of a Roman spring, yet the pure whiteness of it clothing her free, light figure made her almost a perfect personification of the brilliant sunny season.

"How am I to get it home?" said she.

"Carry it on your head, and act the Roman maiden of ancient days," suggested Benson.

"With you in your velvet coat beside me—eh?"

"That is nothing," laughed he. "It is better than the contrast of a stern black coat." He turned and nodded over to the contadina.

"We shall come to-morrow morning, then."

"Ebbene, I say nothing!" The woman's face relaxed, but she went on shelling her peas.

The party strolled away, the great copper conca being slung by its handles between Laura and the artist. It was a picture of quite a different sort to that which reigned over the old Campo dei Fiori, but, nevertheless, there was a quaint, picturesque look about the two as they went gaily over the uneven stones of the market, swinging the shining, antique, vase-shaped thing between them.

Addie and the cleric were behind—two opposite people. She studied art and was impulsive; he dreamed and dreamed of poesy, but lived a purely practical life. He was a worn-out curate from an East London parish.

"Are you inclined for an excursion this afternoon?" she was asking. "We are going in for antiquities and early Christians."

"I am ready; what is it?"

"Nothing that you need read up for, so you can be as lazy as you like all the morning." She had her hands full of 'Lena's roses, and lifted their dewy freshness

to her cheeks. "Do you think I shall get the girl, or not?"

"The girl? I did not hear——"

CHAPTER II.

ALONG the old Appian Way these four young people were driving. Certainly there was an interest, a vast and powerful interest in the place, but—one could not help it—the gladness of youth and of the radiant spring made their thoughts fly from the dust and rubbish of the dead years, and hover—as a summer-bird hovers—over the charms and delights of the to-day that was so fresh and glad.

Who could gaze forward over the vast ocean-like sweep of the still Campagna to the misty hills, without a rush of pathetic gladness welling up in his soul? What was it to them that the same quiet hills had looked down on scenes of busy life and of furious warfare, when now there reigned only the hush of dead silence? To these four that silence was broken by their own glad laughter and talking, and their eyes came back from the misty hills where white Frascati and dim Albano were clustered aloft, to revel and dance over the measureless desert of rank, waving grass and of flowery luxuriance.

"We have two things on our consciences this afternoon," began Addie, when they were well out beyond the tombs. "Which shall be done first?"

"The Columbaria and the Catacombs?" said Ogilvie. "The Catacombs are the most important."

"And the most dreadful!" And Laura gave an involuntary shudder.

"You are a perfect idiot," reproved her cousin. "Have I not told you a hundred times that everyone comes out of them disappointed? You go in with your imagination full of vastness, and you come up with it shrunk to littleness."

They stopped at the gate for the Catacombs. Another carriage was at the moment setting down its occupants, and the said occupants were friends of the Stewarts, winter residents in Rome. Together they strolled up through the untidy garden-way to the door of entrance. More people were there, and they were also acquaintances.

Some made jokes—people will joke at all times and even in the jaws of so awful a burial-place as this—some were silent.

Laura was quiet and white.

The customary lighting of wax-tapers was gone through, and the guide headed

the downward path. What a long string of people! fully twenty were there.

In the many turns and windings of the subterranean chambers and passages parties got funnily mixed up, but at such sight-seeing as this all the world is kin, and terrified Laura clutched at friend and stranger alike. Once it was Ogilvie, often it was Benson, then a short, fat German felt her hand tugging at his coat-tail, then a young American found her pushing her slim, white self between him and the damp walls, for fear she should be left too far behind.

At last—stairs! Blessed daylight and the warm, sunny air. Thank Heaven for light!

Addie was expatiating in her impulsive way on the expectations and disappointments of catacombs in general to a small group of three. Laura was away by the gate, where she had a crowd of dirty, picturesque children about her. She had bought roses from every child, and having got their soldi, the handsome young peasants were ready to talk as fast as she would let them.

There was no hurry—one does not hurry in such warm air. When, too, one's whole body and mind is released from the acting out of duty—there are duties of sight-seeing—one may stroll, and linger, and chatter comfortably with one's friends.

Five minutes, ten minutes, a quarter of an hour went by. People were shaking hands; some said, "Good-bye;" some said, "Al riverderci," they would be always meeting in that gay sight-seeing time.

One carriage had driven off, next came that of the Stewarts, behind was a third, with people stepping into it.

Laura was seated, and by the carriage-door young Benson was standing. The other two were "so fond of talking," laughed Laura.

Her companion laughed too.

"We will repeat that to your cousin; dare we?"

Laura's eyebrows lifted.

"She will give you your answer," said she.

A few minutes more passed.

"That fellow is such a dreamer!" mused Benson.

"What fellow?"

"Ogilvie."

"Mr. Ogilvie! He is worked to death! Dreams? Don't you know what he does at home? My brother knows him, he was at college with him."

"No," said the other, and a little of his careless way marked his one word.

"You have no idea of——"

The girl was showing an unusual impulse, but suddenly stopped. The quick warmth of those few words struck the young man by her side, and without any thought of it his whole bearing changed.

His face had surprise and questioning upon it.

She—she to make much of Ogilvie? He knew the impulsive Addie did this in her masterful way; but this one? He had glorified himself in the fond belief that his own brilliance was admired, fitly admired by this fair and gentle Laura.

Here was a new view of the case.

Laura's face was crimson, deeper in rosy colour than the deepest of her roses; but then, Addie was running up, and discomfort would be gone with her gay rattle.

"Where is Mr. Ogilvie?" she cried. "That dear man! he is bent on discovering something. I am always losing him. One of these days he will be irrecoverable. Hunt him up, do, Mr. Benson."

Some more delay, but at the end of it Benson came back without Ogilvie.

"How tiresome!" Addie certainly pouted.

"Addie!" Laura's face was white to the lips, and her voice was just a low wail of terror. "He is in there—shut in!" she gasped.

"You are too utterly ridiculous!" and Addie set her foot on the carriage-step.

"Am I?" was the scornful answer.

And next moment Laura, her hand upon her cousin's shoulder, moved her aside, passed her, and in a second was flying up the shaggy wilderness of a path.

She had spoken truth.

Ogilvie had lingered one minute to copy an inscription, in that minute the man before him had turned an angle of the intricately-involved passages—he hurried forward. Nothing, no one, was to be seen, no line of twinkling tapers showed; there was a distant murmur of voices, but that faded. He ran, he—went wrong.

Then it came upon his mind that he was lost. For one instant the balance of mental power was gone. Only for a second; after that he was calm and strong.

He felt that he faced death.

Of course all was done in a few moments,

but Laura Stewart was living through an age.

Benson followed her; three or four men who had been standing about caught up her fear; her white face and her few eager words electrified the man who had guided them. Some tapers were lighted, and the search began; quick, and careful, and watchful. Cries and assurances of help were shouted every few seconds.

There came no answer.

One long winding passage, then an angle turned, almost immediately after a second angle, then a step—Laura remembered that.

Then every arm waved, and the flicker of the tapers spread their puny light over what was a comparatively open space—they called that a chapel, and in it was a rude altar of stone. Before it was a dark figure—a marked darkness in the vague darkness the tapers made.

Ogilvie was kneeling, but had fallen forward unconscious. With arms outspread, he was lying against that rude grey altar.

They lifted him up, and carried him swiftly along.

Laura pressed forward. She said nothing. Then a word struck her—it was her own name. The light of a taper had shone upon her face, and Ogilvie, awake, grasped all in a moment. After that Laura no more pressed forward, and, strange to say, when once again daylight shone upon them, she was missed from amongst the group of voluble Italians.

She was sitting in the carriage by her cousin's side when Benson and Ogilvie came out to them.

Benson and Ogilvie! Was that Ogilvie? He was a dark man, a man with almost raven hair, and Benson's companion had a head like snow. By-and-by, Ogilvie—how they all tried to make light of the horrible accident—took off his big hat and felt himself, or rather his head, all over.

"I believe those fellows would like to make a show of me. I have heard of these sudden transformations, but I never dreamt of being the victim of one myself." There was a forced gaiety about his manner.

"You will have your normal blackness again to-morrow, I dare say," said Benson. "Why—ha! Isn't there some fable about a jackdaw, or a crow, or some such creature getting itself painted white?"

"What an ignoramus you are," said Addie. "The point of that old story is just

the very thing you should avoid with our friend. Is he a hypocrite? does he set up a false show?—does he?"

Benson shrugged his shoulders.

"Be a friend, Ogilvie, and get me out of my scrape."

"Indeed I shall not; let us make him exercise his genius for flattery." Ogilvie looked from Addie to Laura. "Now!" He set one hand upon Benson's knee, and again he looked to Laura.

Now this young lady having gone through a pretty sharp experience of terror, was at the moment lying back on the cushions of the carriage, and feeling limp. One tender word would have made her cry, and for such tears she would have been angry with herself.

She, in the past half-hour, had learnt a secret, and like a true-hearted maiden had the noble simplicity of believing she could, and ought to, keep it a secret. Gentle and tender of soul, she suddenly grasped a quick and firm control over herself. She sat upright, and picking up some of her forgotten roses, she dashed forth some gay words.

"Three against one!—too bad," and Benson made a gesture of disgust.

"A hundred to one," she cried. "Now begin and say the best things you can think of. As soon as we are in Rome again, Mr. Ogilvie will be a hero, and unless you show yourself friendly, you will receive the cold shoulder. Better stick to us all, and get a little reflection of the hero-worship."

So they went on, and soon they had left the open vastness of the Campagna. The hills behind and around were draped with the filmy gauze of twilight, the fair spring twilight which has the clear whiteness shining through it. Behind, too, through the openings of the hills, were the grand colours of the gathering sunset, and as their road wound, one face and another got the radiant flush upon it.

But no one said a word about it—each one's tongue rattled as it had never done before, each one flew instinctively from any subject that was grave or that led to thought, and so on from thought to a speech which might touch the event of the afternoon.

Ogilvie loitered as the girls got out of the carriage. Laura was the last. Addie had run up the staircase leading to their apartment. Laura's impulse was to follow her—an unthinking impulse, and one which

in a moment was controlled by her quiet, simple dignity.

Perhaps she was pale; if so, the pallor only made her fairness more delicate. She took some shawls from Ogilvie's arm, and said, really in quite a matter-of-fact voice:

"I suppose, in reality, you were only a few seconds."

"A few seconds? I do not know. I cannot think of it. I cannot speak about it yet. How were you there? How——"

The paleness was gone from the girl's face.

"How?" she murmured. "I don't know. Yes," she cried, setting a strong control over herself; "yes, I do know. I believe I was the first to see the possibility."

"And——"

"And I flew," she cried eagerly.

In an instant she saw she had betrayed herself.

"And my life, my reason," said Ogilvie in a low undertone.

"I shall not speak one word more about it," she said, speaking in a wild way that was totally unlike herself. "Don't you want some tea? Aunt will never give us any if we stay behind the others. You've no idea of her tyranny!"

CHAPTER III.

JOHN OGILVIE was a hero, as the girls had said he would be. Days went by, and, go where he would, the sensationalism of his adventure had gone before him, and every eye was turned to see the man whose hair had changed from raven-black to snowy-white in a moment; the man who had been buried alive, so to speak.

But it was too much for him. He ran away from it, and set off on an excursion to the mountains. He said hero-worship was too tyrannous to be endured.

Easy to say, but the truth was that he was shaken by his adventure. And the more he tried to nerve himself, the more he failed; the more he sought to speak of it, so much the more did his friends, thinking it for his good, persistently lead away from the subject. Laura avoided him; Addie and Benson were absorbed in matters artistic. It was becoming clear how their comradeship would end. Ogilvie at last told himself that a week or two away would help him to conquer his difficulties.

So he went in and out of one country inn and another, drifting along the delicious days, till they once more found him with

his nerves at rest, and his mind quietly looking at things as they were.

On a May evening he was wandering down one of the long green alleys by Genzano; the air was soft and sweet; the half-sad note of doves fell in with the humour of the hour; children's laughter came in too; farther off there sounded the gay refrain of a popular song, as labourers came slowly in from the fields.

Through the pale green of the limes was the intense, cloudless blue of the sky; from a break between two trees Ogilvie looked out, and saw across the vast level of the Campagna below him the misty, formless substance of Rome. By instinct his eyes sought for the "bubble" of St. Peter's dome glistening from the vague mistiness. He could not see it. Rome without that aerial "bubble" was scarcely Rome, and his gaze wandered over slope and valley, over shining white town and darkening wood, until it was caught by a sudden glow of light.

Away in the west came rapid, floating islands of amethyst and crimson and gold, rising from the misty, ocean-like land, soaring and sweeping aloft till the radiant blue overhead was paled. Paled, then flushed. How long he watched he could not tell. It seemed an age of wonder and of indescribable grandeur of beauty, yet it was but a short while. The flush of sunset is short in Italy, the pale gloaming is shorter; night was upon him warm and soft before he knew.

And then he turned, and, having outer things shut away from his eyes, he fell to thinking. Naturally the closer things and the intimate friends of his present life came uppermost in those aimless thoughts of his.

You say "naturally"—why so?

Might not faraway interests have been so much the stronger that space should have been annihilated, and that his thoughts should have turned to his London parish? They might have done so, but—here comes the gist of the matter—there was a spell in the present which neither past nor distant things had ever held.

John Ogilvie was in love. Yes, very decidedly in love. Once he had told himself that work was to be his mistress—that was before he had seen Rome and Laura Stewart. Once he had held before his eyes the ideal of a solitary, unselfish life; now, presided over by Laura Stewart, he saw a life which was not solitary, but was still to be unselfish.

Now, how soon should he go back to Rome? He was rid of weakness. Nay, as he walked leisurely in the soft, young night, he derided himself for having come away. He would go on the morrow.

He would be driven to the Albano station in the early, dewy morning, and would get to Rome in good time. Why should he not breakfast with the Stewarts?

Some little matter went wrong at the inn; the old, broken carriage was not ready—no matter what the hindrance was. A fact remained—Ogilvie could not go by the early train.

No man is perfect, and Ogilvie was—a man. He could be vexed, to put it mildly.

In plain English he fumed. Also he spoke certain distinct words of disapproval to the lazy Faello who was buckling or tying on the very rudimentary harness, words which made the said Faello fire out a retort—"that sober padre to say such words!"

While he fumed, a lad came in leisurely, but perspiring. He brought a telegram up from Albano. One gets into a fair condition of heat if one walks all the way from Albano, even in the cool of the morning.

Ogilvie loftily ignored the boy. He was too angry for anything. Nevertheless, the telegram was for him.

Here it is: "From Mrs. Stewart to the Rev. J. Ogilvie, etc., etc.—Meet the nine train at Albano. Plan the day's work. Do not fail."

He showed a very different manner and a very different voice as he turned hurriedly to Faello and bid him hasten. He must be at Albano a quarter of an hour earlier than he had intended. Friends were coming, there was a lira for him if he got him at the station in time.

Backsheesh, backsheesh! What wonderful magic power is in you! Just let the circle of a silver coin shine before the dullest eyes in creation, and what sense leaps into them, what activity electrifies slow limbs!

Of course Faello drove well; of course Ogilvie stood waiting on the platform as the train came puffing leisurely in.

What a comical side there is in these meetings! One would have thought that the separation, instead of having been only for a fortnight, had been for years, so warm and effusive were the hand-shakings and the greetings.

"You look a new man," said Benson.

"So strong and robust," added kindly

Mrs. Stewart. She was a slight, round woman, both lovely and loveable, clear-eyed, and genial, one of those happy beings who are gifted with the faculty of saying just the right thing one wants said. All the girls who knew her wanted to kiss her, and for the men and women, they either were mad to protect her or to be helped by her. "Yes, I mean it," she added with an air of supreme conviction. "There is nothing like the mountain towns to cure the lassitude of Rome. I wish we could have a week here, don't you, girls?"

"Wishing again," said Addie. "We have to go, so there is no good in wishing."

"Go?" ejaculated Ogilvie—this was as they were driving along. "Where?"

Benson, on the box beside Faello, heard the exclamation.

"They are all frightened about fever, my friend, and they are packed and are going off to England the day after tomorrow. England does not see me for a year. Shall I court the fever, or shall I come up to you in your mountain retreat?"

"Neither. I was coming into Rome to-day if your telegram had not kept me."

Ogilvie's tongue halted.

"That sounds complimentary, Mr. Ogilvie. You do not bless us," said the impulsive Addie.

"Perhaps I meant the most——"

"There, don't say any more. If there is a thing I loathe it is a fulsome compliment. I had far rather have you snub me."

"Addie dear, how can you? Now we shall have no kindly speeches, and I for one shall be desolate," put in the bright, sweet mother. "Do not obey her, Mr. Ogilvie."

So they ran on talking a great deal, and enjoying themselves, though in all the light talk there was very little worth putting on paper.

All the various experiences of the fortnight had to be detailed. In the midst of some story Mrs. Stewart was telling, her daughter burst in with this:

"I have conquered, Mr. Ogilvie. Yes; I have ridden rough-shod over father, and mother, and lover, and all!"

"I am in a fog!"

"No, you're not. My picture. Now?"

Perhaps he was in a worse fog than before, for he had never seen the said picture, and did not know its subject; had, in fact, only come in for shreds and ends of talk about it. He knew she had a

studio, so supposed that pictures came forth from it.

To put it suggestively he—was not Benson.

"I must plead guilty of dense darkness," he said. "I can never have seen your picture."

He looked over to Laura in a mystified way for help.

She gave a little laugh.

"No one has seen it yet, not even I, and I climb those stairs to her studio every day. There is always a scuffle and a veiling when I touch the handle of the door. I have seen the model, though," and Laura nodded her fair head with quite a gay sprightliness.

Ogilvie still looked his questioning.

"You remember the girl in the Campo dei Fiori, Mr. Ogilvie—that lovely girl in the peasant dress we always buy the roses from?"

"Old Mother Cagiati's daughter," explained her cousin. "You know."

"Yes, I remember now." However, the details of the model-hunting had not come within Ogilvie's ken, and he floundered into a remark which was not apposite. "The girl was shy, was she not?"

"Shy! Not a bit of it! Mère Cagiati stood on the proprieties, but I've beaten her. I came across the lover, and of course he had to agree to what Lena wanted. And he is pressed into the service too. You'll have a grand Horatius, Mr. Benson."

Addie turned up to that gentleman, who was perched behind her head.

Ogilvie had seen a huge canvas in Benson's studio; the subject was the old story of the fight of Horatius on the Janiculum. The young painter's ideas were vast; the whole array of armies, and people, and senators were sketched; but—Horatius? He still wanted the ideal Roman when Ogilvie saw the work.

"Yes," answered Benson, "yes, I am more than fortunate. One does not see such a head and such a frame, as that Pompeo Gati has, in a long day's march. He ought to make the success of the picture."

"There you go—I shall have to take you down a peg! Don't fancy you are going to soar aloft like that. Dear! do look at those flowers—they are a perfect carpet! Mother darling, time is no object, and I must have some. Come, Laura."

The four climbed a bank. A straggling

bit of woodland was here, and in the shadowy warmth by the young trees' feet were flowers—masses of flowers.

Mrs. Stewart sat quietly in the carriage and waited. She talked to Faello, and she learnt his small history, heard about his wife and his child—in a word, charmed him, as she did everyone.

She did not notice how the time flew. However, as Addie had said, "time was no object," and she was content with her delicious laziness, and content with what pleased the girls.

Laura was the first to return. She was a picture of fair radiance as she ran up to the carriage. Her white dress and her flapping, broad-brimmed, white hat, all shining in the burning brilliance of the sunshine, her face tinted more than its wont with a rosy warmth, struck Mrs. Stewart. There was a new beauty in the girl's face.

"We have come," cried she.

"So I see, dear."

"Oh, aunt," Laura threw herself on the seat beside Mrs. Stewart, and impulsively clasped one of that lady's hands, "there is something—something to tell you. I am so happy."

Her face flushed rosier, and a glint of tears shone in her glad eyes.

Mrs. Stewart felt a trembling in the fingers that were clasping hers, and, sympathetic woman that she was, fell herself to trembling for companionship.

"Ah!—what?—dear Laura!" These vague exclamations were all her tongue could frame. But she was quickly mastering the difficulty. "A secret? Let me hear it," she added in her kindly way.

"I am not half good enough. He—I really don't know how——"

Mrs. Stewart smiled, and looked to John Ogilvie, who stood by her elbow.

"You will give her to me, Mrs. Stewart?" he asked simply.

He, too, seemed for the moment to lack speech, but his hand, too, sought Mrs. Stewart's.

Away on the top of the bank, Addie and Benson were fencing. Benson had seen the other two start for the carriage, and he was struck by some wild desire to speak some personal thoughts of his own.

"I have something to say," he blundered.

"Is that new?" asked she.

"You mean I am a rattle. But—listen now, do."

"I cannot listen to anything serious. I never was less inclined for it."

"You are leaving——"

"The day after to-morrow. We have not changed. Do you want any more packages taken to England for you?"

"You know all that. Do leave those flowers."

"You are sure there is nothing contraband in your package. 'Leave these flowers?' I should think not! I am going over to those forget-me-nots. Is that syringa? Growing wild, I declare! Go and get as much as your arms will hold."

He was not to be banished in this way. But when had he ever before felt himself so tongue-tied?

"I want to ask you something before you leave. We shall never get a chance of being alone together after this," he protested.

"Alone together! Do talk common-sense," she cried. "The weight of your thoughts has overcome the usual lightness of your tongue. We must be quick, or we shall have mother in an agony of impatience. Do you want a knife for the syringa?"

"No." The answer was blunt. He suddenly saw his opportunity. "Yes," he cried, "I do want one," and he followed her as she waded through the masses of grass, and violets, and cyclamens, and ferns.

"It is no use coming to me, then, for I left mine at home."

"Will you give me—— Miss Stewart—Adelaide—I must——"

"You must go and get that syringa, Mr. Benson—Marmaduke. Now, sir, you see the effect of your rudeness to me. I shall not allow you to speak to me all the rest of the day."

He obeyed, and she kept her silence until they were once again with the others.

"My dear Addie," cried her mother. "What are you going to do with all those things? It is a young tree Mr. Benson has pulled up! You should think."

"So I do, mother. I want the things."

"What for?"

"For the studio."

"And you have cleared it out and locked it up," put in Laura with mischief in her eyes.

"So I have. Well, never mind, they can go into Mr. Benson's studio."

OLD SHAWBURTON'S.

It was in the spring-time, more than thirty years ago. April was smiling with unusual amiability on the whole land, and such few tears as she let fall now and then served but to soften and temper what otherwise might have been a too exuberant joy, considering the tender age of the year. No part of the country could have responded more gleefully to this mood of the showery month than did that where rises the range of the lofty Colvern Hills. All the delights which the poets attribute to the spring's return seemed to be realised, and if the wind still held a little persistently from the east, it was yet so softened and subdued by the puffs of balmy south which came with it, that its sting was quite taken out of it, and only prevented the almost unclouded sun from scorching too fiercely. Such weather in such a region could not fail to be enjoyable; every sense was gratified, and even the most hardened cockney could not but reap some pleasure from a ramble along those smooth and easy, if steep hill-paths, which place the Colverns within the reach of the feeblest climber. At that season, too, there was absolute solitude even at mid-day, and, wandering from end to end of the lofty ridge, one would scarce meet a living soul. Of tourists there were absolutely none.

How I came to be lodging at the little cottage embosomed in that wooded cleft half-way up the hillside, and lying just above the straggling village of Colvern Wells, matters not. But there I was, and there occurred to me as strange an experience as it has ever been my luck to encounter throughout a not altogether uneventful life.

Amidst the many dips and hollows, some very precipitous, to be found towards the southern end of the range of hills, and near that part of the Dereford road which skirts them, is, or then was, one peculiarly secluded. Lying far back from the highway, and shrouded by a clustering bower of fir-trees, mountain-ash, and silver-birch, the hollow is scarcely perceptible, the trees appearing but one of the many patches of stunted foliage which clamber up the hill-sides in sheltered places. Only coming upon it from above were you made aware of the existence of a cup-like little amphitheatre, shut in on three sides by the steep, smooth, shouldering hill, whilst the fourth

was closed from view of the road, far down below, by the dense wood.

A few weather-beaten, wind-worn trees straggled up on to the open high ground, and at a little distance helped further to mask the lonely dell. It was as if some huge bird had made her nest there, and, taking advantage of the natural formation, had hidden her home from man's intrusion by cunning artifice.

I had discovered the spot, and had stood gazing over the sheer-down grassy sides into the woody bottom for some minutes before I observed the cottage which nestled in its midst. Scant as was the leafage yet on the trees, the building was so shut in by them that it seemed to be a part and parcel of the natural growth of the place, both in colour and irregular form. Closer scrutiny showed it to be uninhabited and in a ruinous state. The ivy-clad, moss-grown, grey-stone walls, and still more moss-grown, grey slate-roof and small chimney-stack; the shattered window-frames, and panes of broken glass here and there, with a barred, worm-eaten shutter half closed; a small, dilapidated shed, standing apart with a bit of fence enclosing a perfect little wilderness of a garden; all spoke of years of desolation. It was but two storeys high, irregular of shape, as if added to from time to time. As the eye became accustomed to the intricacies of the overhanging boughs and dense undergrowth, the faint indication of a narrow path winding away downhill towards the main road could be discerned; and a more retired, shut-in, obscure abode, for there was no other house within two miles, it would have been hardly possible to imagine. Whilst speculating as to the kind of occupant it might once have had, and what his object could have been in thus shutting himself out from the world, I saw to my surprise that I was not the sole spectator of the scene. On the opposite side of the cup-like hill to that where I had stretched myself upon the grass, and beneath one of the stunted trees which had crept up to the top of the overhanging side, sat a man smoking, and evidently watching me.

He looked quite respectable, and after a little while I rose and wandered round towards him, thinking perhaps he might be able to tell me the history of the cottage. He, too, rose as I approached, and then I saw that he was a young, pale-faced fellow, of middle height, dressed in a suit of grey tweed of common cut. He seemed nervous

and fidgety, twirling and twisting the thin cane he carried in his long, sinewy hands. He was evidently anxious to speak, and turning towards me, but without directly looking at me, said :

"Queer-looking place that, sir, to live in, isn't it?"

"Yes," I answered. "Do you happen to know anything about it? I wasn't aware there was a house down there. Who does it belong to?"

"It used to belong to my grandfather. They say it's haunted now."

"Ah, haunted, is it? Such a place ought to be," I said as I walked closer up to him. "Tell me about it."

"Oh, I couldn't here," he replied gravely. "I shouldn't like to speak of what I have been told so close to the place. I should expect to hear the horrible noises, and I think if I did I should go out of my mind."

This was a strange speech, I thought, and made me wonder whether he wasn't out of his mind already. His downcast, melancholy expression, furtive glances, and nervous, restless manner, added to his mysterious words, quite justified the idea.

"I wonder if it is true," he went on rapidly. "I should like to find out, but I haven't the courage, although I have come down to these parts for the purpose. Do you think you could help me? I mean, would you object to staying out here with me until it is dark? I think I shouldn't so much mind if I wasn't alone, yet they say no two people together hear the sounds; they can only be heard by one person at a time, and that's the difficulty. You are a stranger to me, sir, but you look kind and friendly, and perhaps you——" He paused, and, regarding me with a still furtive but more prolonged look than he had yet bestowed, walked a few paces away from the edge of the hollow. "If you'll come a little farther off, I'll try and tell you what I've heard about it, and what I know about it, but I daren't do so close to it."

I cannot say he was quite the sort of chance companion I should have selected to stroll about with on these lonely hills, but even in those days I was an old traveller, cosmopolitan in my habits, ready to talk to anybody likely to afford amusement, and if this young fellow did happen to be a little out of his wits he could do me no harm; moreover, he had excited my curiosity somewhat, so acquiescing in his suggestion, I walked slowly away with him, back in the direction of Colvern Wells.

Except for his nervous expression, and the twitching of his mouth, he had a pleasant face, if not actually good-looking. His restless eyes were dark and luminous, despite contracted pupils, and his thick, black hair, worn rather long, added to the natural ivory-like pallor of his smooth beardless face. He was a mere boy, probably not above seventeen. He continued puffing away at his short clay pipe, the odour of which, mingling with the pure clear air, struck me as being a little peculiar, and as he presently refilled it from a common purse-shaped pouch, I observed that the tobacco looked peculiar also. We wandered on for some distance in silence, whilst he ever and anon kept looking back towards the copse as if uncertain whether we were yet far enough off to allow of his speaking freely. At last he said :

"Have you not been told, sir, what they say about the noises heard in that house?"

"No, indeed; but I have only been in the neighbourhood a few days."

"Well, they are very awful, from all accounts; most of the people about seem to know of them, if they've not heard them. Sometimes they say they sound as if they were caused by the movement of heavy weights, at others by the human voice moaning mournfully, and then rising sometimes to a shrill wail or cry of agony. Then, it is said, there will be a mingling of the two noises, heavy weights and voice combined. It is altogether indescribable," continued the young fellow, apparently quite terrified at the mere thought.

"How long is it since any one lived there?" I asked.

"Oh, not for many years—nobody, I fancy, since my grandfather."

"Did it belong to him? Did he build it?"

"I think so; I never rightly heard about that. I never saw him. I did not even know my mother, who was his daughter, although at times I seem to recollect the sound of her voice; nor my father either. They are all dead, I suppose. I have no relations. I believe I am what's called a ward in Chancery. Nobody seems to care twopence about me, except Mr. Grimmall, and he don't take any trouble, so when I leave school I don't quite know what I shall do, and I leave at Midsummer."

"Mr. Grimmall! Who is he?"

"Oh, he's my grandfather's lawyer, and they say he acts for the court, whatever that means, looks after the property and after me like a sort of guardian,

appointed, I suppose, by Chancery. He lives close to Bristol, and he asks me to go and see him sometimes for a day or two in the holidays. This Easter he said he should not be at home, so, as I had saved some pocket-money—they don't keep me very short—I thought I would come over and have a look at this place where grandfather lived. I came by train to Dereford, and then over to Sedbury by coach the day before yesterday. I am at a college at Clifton."

"May I ask your name?" I interposed.

"Harling is my name," he answered.

"And your grandfather's?"

"Shawburton was his name, and the house seems to be only known in these parts as 'Old Shawburton's.' I had a great deal of trouble to find it, and only did so by mentioning his name. That's all I knew, for I have been kept very much in the dark as to the whole business; but I don't mean to stand it any longer, I am a man now, and I am determined to find out a little for myself. When I mentioned my grandfather's name, they said: 'Oh yes, you mean the tumbledown old place up in the hills yonder, the place that's haunted, and where the horrid noises are heard.'"

"Whom do you say you asked? Who told you this?"

"Oh, several people. First, the landlord of the little inn near Sedbury where I am lodging. He directed me to it first, and then a man down in the road—a farmer's man—he pointed out where I should find it among the trees, for you can't see it, you know, from anywhere, till you are close upon it. But he said if I didn't want to be frightened to death I'd better not go near the place after dark. It was all quiet by day, but, directly night came on, the noises always began if anybody went near the place alone. Oh, I do so want to find out what it all means," cried the young fellow, suddenly stopping and wringing his hands. "I know there is something to be found out, and by me, if I only knew how to set about it. I am sure I should not feel as I do very often if I hadn't something to do with it. Every now and then, sir," he continued, resuming his walk more rapidly, and looking very strangely at me, "every now and then I feel drawn to the place. I have done so for a year past, and this Easter I determined to come and see it, and now I am here I don't know what to do. My courage seems to fail me."

There was something very pitiful in the

way the lad thus outlined his apparent connection with this mysterious abode. He was so evidently in earnest that his words carried conviction of their truth, despite any doubts his behaviour might have suggested as to his sanity.

"The house is in Chancery, then, I imagine, as well as you," I said. "That will account for its dilapidated state. Do you propose going to look over it? Who has the keys?"

"Oh, I don't think I dare go into it," he continued, with an access of the terrified look which constantly overspread his face. "I couldn't alone. Besides, the keys—I never thought of the keys. I suppose Mr. Grimmall has them. How stupid of me!"

"If you have no relations, as you say, I presume the place belongs to you, or will do so when you are of age?"

"I suppose so," he answered gloomily, "but I don't know. I have heard there is a dispute about it. I mean, the death of some person or other has to be proved. Nobody has ever explained to me how matters stand, and until the last year or so I have never cared to know. Now I have seen the place I am more than ever determined to get at the rights of it. Something tells me I ought and must."

We had walked rapidly a considerable distance along the smooth hill-top, and had now come to where one of the paths began its descent towards Colvern Wells. Twilight had been gradually creeping on, and as we drew under the shadow of the slopes, and some more straggling copse, it became comparatively dark. Suddenly my companion seemed to awake to this fact.

"Stop!" he cried out as he halted. "I am going the wrong way. I must turn back, or I shall lose it altogether across those wild hills. Besides, I dare not go near that house after dark, and I can't avoid doing so if I go across them to Sedbury."

"You had better come this way, then, down into the high-road," I suggested, "and go back by that. It is rather farther, but you can't miss your way then, and the moon will be up within an hour. But we shall have a change in the weather, I fancy," I added. "The wind is rising, and there are some ominous-looking clouds making their appearance. The road will be your best way."

"Thank you—yes, I'll do so. I don't like being out so late in the country."

He hurried forward as he spoke, and again stopped suddenly, saying:

"I suppose I mustn't ask you to walk back a little way with me, sir? I mean along the road until we get past the wood."

I evaded this question, for I was tired, and did not fancy extending my rambles so late.

"I am close to my lodgings now," I said, "and if you come on to them, I can show you a short cut into the road."

He came on in silence, and we soon reached my door. Not wishing to be churlish, and feeling curious to hear a little more about my strange acquaintance, I asked if he would come in and have a glass of beer before starting. He gladly accepted the offer, and in another minute we were in my little sitting-room, where a frugal meal was prepared. Still restless, he, nevertheless, sat down and joined me in it, and in answer to the questions with which I plied him he said, amongst other things, that the landlord of the inn at Sedbury, an elderly man, had told him that Mr. Shawburton was a queer old character, who would sometimes not be seen for months outside his door. He lived there with one old woman-servant as queer as himself. He never let anyone cross his threshold, and what he lived on, or how he lived, or what he did, nobody rightly knew. But in earlier days he had a daughter living with him whom he kept as close a prisoner as he did himself, but at last she disappeared—folks said ran away nearly twenty years ago—broke her bonds as was natural; at any rate, no one ever saw her again.

"That was my mother, I expect," exclaimed the young man vehemently. "And it's about her death, I guess, that the dispute is, and why I was made a ward in Chancery. The landlord said, as far as he knew, when Mr. Shawburton and his old servant left the place, it was locked up and has never been opened since. It is supposed they went to London, where he must have died. At any rate, he never came back, and Mr. Grimnall has always spoken of him to me as being dead, whenever he does speak of him."

"And your father and mother, does Mr. Grimnall ever speak to you of them?" I asked.

"No, he seems to avoid that subject if I bring it up. He always treats me like a child, and tells me not to ask questions. But I mean to ask though, now I'm a man," went on young Mr. Harling with a flash of determination. "I feel I ought to be told all about it." He tossed off the

glass of beer he had in his hand, and then sank back dejectedly in his chair.

Needless to say I became more than ever interested. The lad might not be quite "all there," as it is called, but something was evidently preying on his mind. Sitting there with downcast eyes, and his limp, restless hands now hanging wearily across his knees, he looked a sad picture of youthful dejection. After a considerable silence I was about to speak, when I discovered he had fallen sound asleep. I had not the heart to disturb him, and I crept out of the room with a view to consulting my landlady. She was in her kitchen, and very briefly telling her how I had met the lad, asked if she knew anything about Old Shawburton's. The question at once loosened her tongue, but she threw no more light upon the subject than the young man had done.

"Well," I said, "the poor young chap seems dead beat, what with worry of mind and fatigue. It's getting very late, and there is going to be wild weather. I don't like his having to walk to Sedbury to-night in the state he is, it's nearly seven miles. Could you give him a bed?"

"Yes, surely, sir," she replied, "if you think he's a safe customer."

"Oh, he's safe enough, I'll guarantee; there's no harm in him, he won't run off with the spoons."

The end of this was that after gently waking the lad, and telling him the arrangement I proposed, he eagerly fell into it, and I left him soon after ten o'clock alone in a snug, clean, little bedroom at the back of the cottage on the ground-floor. An hour later, and by the time the full moon was beginning to light up the wild scurrying clouds, and to peep out "pale in her anger" at intervals between them, the few inmates of the little lodging-house appeared to be sound asleep, into which state I also fell before long, despite the wind now howling down the chimney and wrangling with the window-sashes.

"Sir, sir, would you please to get up at once!" Such were the words which aroused me the next morning, as the landlady stood tapping at the bedroom-door. "He's gone, sir, he's gone!" she continued, "and he ain't never slept in his bed, and I'm sure I only hope he's gone away empty-handed."

A rapid investigation showed this statement to be true, whilst it also confirmed the good woman's hope. The young man was

nowhere to be found, but nothing besides himself was missing. He must have simply unbolted the outer door, close to which his own opened, and had departed before the house was astir. His room remained just as it was when he was left alone in it, and although the bed had not been slept in, he had evidently been lying down on the outside of it; and there lingered in the apartment a faint odour of that strange-smelling tobacco of his; was there a flavour of opium about it?

"Well," said I, "we must suppose he waited till daylight, and then being unable to sleep, and growing impatient, he started off home; but it's strange behaviour. I'll walk over to Sedbury after breakfast, if the weather will let me, and see if I can discover anything more about him; I am somehow convinced there is a method in the lad's madness, if mad he be."

With this intention, after swallowing a hasty meal, I was soon on my way up the slopes. The wind had calmed down, the sun was shining brightly. I had hardly gone a hundred yards round the first bend or zigzag of the path, ere, what should I behold but the prostrate form of the young fellow among the brambles and undergrowth skirting the way! He was lying face downwards, and his grey suit was besmirched with the wet soil, whilst his cane and soft wide-awake, crumpled and battered, lay close beside him. Alarmed and amazed, and fully expecting to find him insensible, I hurried up only to discover him trembling and shivering with cold or fright, or both. As I raised him he looked at me at first with dazed and stupefied eyes, like a man coming out of "the fierce vexation of a dream." But, recognising me the next moment, he seized my hand, and appeared a little reassured. Still trembling and holding me tight, he struggled to his feet, and looked round in a vague, bewildered manner. Without putting many questions to him then, I suggested that we had better return to my quarters, and in ten minutes more we were again seated in the little sitting-room much as we had been the previous evening, barring his damp and dishevelled state. He looked, however, calmer now, and met my glance less nervously. He spoke, too, with a steadier voice, and with the air of a man whose mind had been relieved from some heavy weight. Once again, too, I found myself naturally plying him with questions, in reply to which, by degrees, I elicited from him the following extra-

ordinary statement. How much of it, if any, was actually true will never be known, but that he sincerely believed he had passed through the strange experience he related, I as sincerely believe.

When left alone, he told me, he threw himself on the bed without undressing; the curious longing which he had had of late to probe this matter to its depths, taking possession of him with renewed force. He had a strong desire, he said, in spite of his misgivings, and my hospitality, to venture forth into the night; to court these mysterious sounds, and see if he could learn anything from them. After lying still for a while revolving what to do, he suddenly made up his mind. He became inspired with an unusual courage—yes, he would go out; he would go and listen in the dead of the night to these noises for himself. Already the boisterous elements filled his ears with a turmoil of sounds. Already he fancied they had a meaning in them; the wind wailed, as if calling upon him to act; and when hesitation filled his mind, it roared and thundered as if in reproof. To him the rising and falling of the tempest was like the despair alternating with the anger of a human being. Then he rose, and finding no difficulty in creeping out of the house, he boldly sought the solitude of the hills. A thing he could no more have contemplated doing, he urged, an hour or two before, than he could have flown.

In a little while he found his way to the ridge overlooking the dell; it seemed to him that he had reached it without walking—reached the very spot where we first met. The moon, though not visible, illumined the heavens sufficiently to enable him to see plainly where he was. Indifferent to the storm, and, indeed, to anything but the purpose he had in view, which, as far as I could glean from his wild story, was now to penetrate and search the house, for what he hardly knew, he began to make his descent towards it by a path amidst the scattered trees fringing the slope. Ere long he arrived at the dilapidated paling. Scrambling over this, in a moment he had his hand on the outside shutter of a low back window. Directly he touched it he declared the moaning of the wind, which had grown more human in its tone with every step he made towards the house, faded into a whisper, as if some one were speaking to him from within. No words at first were audible, but as he listened they seemed to shape themselves into an

oft-repeated sentence, yet still so faint as to be unintelligible. Burning to know its meaning, he forced the shutter, which yielded and fell back. The moon suddenly glittered on the cobweb-covered glass, as she shot a ray straight down into the lonely dell. Why he should remember such a trivial detail as the cobwebs, he said he could not explain, but they appeared to cut the light up into a thousand glittering stars, which all but blinded him as he tried to push the window up. At first it would not move, but presently it fell in with a crash, and in another moment he stood within that strange, deserted tenement.

Except for certain dark corners and recesses, the moonbeams which found their way in through the open window revealed a long, low room, scantily furnished, extending across the whole building. On the walls hung strange obscure forms as of animals and of birds, some with hideously grimacing heads and faces protruding, others as if they were flattened and pressed close against the wainscot. From the ceiling were suspended more uncouth shapes that looked like skeletons, which swayed to and fro dismally, as if endowed with life. Many of these, or parts of them, appeared to have fallen, for the floor was strewn here and there with bones. But he disregarded the weird aspect of the apartment; at least, it did not affect his purpose, for, once within the place, he stood still and listened.

"Now I dare say you won't believe me, sir," he went on, "but in a moment I distinctly heard a soft, low, woman's voice whisper these words: 'Search the shed, and give me rest. Search the shed, search the shed!' They were thrice repeated, and then nothing was to be heard save the continued roaring of the wind, listen though I did for many minutes with all my ears. After this my former fears seemed to overcome me; again my teeth chattered, and I shook from head to foot; I felt as if I could not move, as if I was pinned to the floor. I don't know how long I stood there; my whole desire then was to get out of the room. I seemed to have no other thought, just as before I had no thought but how to get into it. I had learned all I could—all that it was necessary for me to know. How I escaped from the hateful place—how I got back to where you found me, I have no recollection; in fact, I know nothing more. But that voice was the voice of my mother—I feel sure of it, I seemed to recognise it,

and I shall search the shed," he added determinately. "Oh, sir, do help me!"

Passing over details, I walked back that afternoon with this strange witless youth to Sedbury by the road, and that night I wrote a long letter to Mr. Grimmall, whose address he gave me, explaining all that had happened, and suggesting to that eminent solicitor that the lad was hardly in a fit state of mind to be left to himself. Further, I ventured to say, that if there were any foundation for Mr. Harling's account of his connection with the former occupant of the deserted house, it might be well to examine the premises closely. My own opinion was from the first that there was a method in the boy's madness, otherwise I should not have been so interested in him, and I expressed as much to Mr. Grimmall. I did not exactly credit his account of his midnight adventure in the lonely dell, much less that part of it, of course, touching the whispered sentence. He had simply had a nightmare, a bad dream, perhaps a half-waking one, due in part to some strong narcotic or opiate which he mixed with his tobacco, and I thought that, stupefied and delirious, he had wandered out of my lodgings early in the morning on to the hillside, and had there fallen down in some sort of fit or state of coma where I found him. I did not believe he had gone a yard farther.

Before leaving him at Sedbury I made him promise to take no steps in the business until I should hear from Mr. Grimmall; I, on my part, promising to do all in my power to help him to clear up the mystery.

The following day, which brought with it a renewal of the windy, tempestuous weather, I strolled over to the ridge above the old house just to see whether the window by which the lad stated he had effected an entrance exhibited any proof of his having done so. Somewhat to my surprise, sure enough, it was wide open, and the sash apparently smashed in. To descend into the hollow, which now under a leaden sky wore a truly gloomy and forbidding aspect, and to take a peep into that weird room for myself, was but natural; so down I went, and in a few minutes I, too, stood looking into it. Certainly it bore out exactly what the young man had described.

Apparently it had been used as a sort of museum of natural history, skins of animals and birds, many stuffed, grimly looking down from their shelves, with the skeletons hanging from the ceilings and

still swaying with the wind. All this was true enough, and I could easily believe that a distempered imagination would, under the fitful gleams of moonlight, readily conjure up all sorts of sounds and sights. After peering about for some time in the gloom, and not feeling tempted then to carry my investigations much farther, I beat a retreat, rather puzzled again as to how much of the boy's statement could be relied on as fact. The turbulent wind might have torn open the shutter, and burst in the sash, certainly, but it was rather a curious coincidence that it should have done so at that particular time.

For two days nothing happened; but on the morning of the third, which was wet and gloomy, a chaise stopped at my door, and from it an old gentleman alighted, asking for me. This was Mr. Grimmall himself, a personage as grim of aspect as of name. A sallow face, surmounted by a crop of thick, iron-grey hair, with short whiskers and bushy eyebrows to match; dark eyes, a grave expression, a hesitating, harsh voice—all these points forced themselves upon my attention, and accounted for the absence of confidence between the solicitor and his young client. A word or two brought us immediately to the business in hand.

"I thought it better," began Mr. Grimmall, "to come over and see you; and, to tell you the truth, your letter was a great relief, for there was some uncertainty as to young Harling's whereabouts, and we are greatly obliged to you for writing. In plain words, this stupid boy has left his school, or local college, without letting the authorities know where he was going. With your letter I received one from the master enquiring if he was with me. Had you not written I should have been most anxious; as it is, I am on my way to fetch him back, but I thought I would call and thank you. I am familiar with this neighbourhood, and am just now staying at no great distance, and my absence from home it is, which has prevented an earlier acknowledgment of your letter. Your reference to his family affairs, of which he has spoken to you, and the extraordinary account he gave you of a visit he is supposed to have paid to his old grandfather's house, with your suggestion that some investigation would be desirable, oblige me to say a word on the subject. You cannot imagine there is any truth in his adventure. At the same time we would gladly catch at any clue which

might lead us to a proof of his mother's death. Still, as a reasoning being, I am not going to suppose we shall arrive at it by supernatural agency. You cannot believe that, sir, any more than myself?"

"No, truly," I acquiesced; "but without intruding upon private matters, I would ask whether the outline of Mr. Shawburton's affairs, as indicated by his grandson and current in the neighbourhood, is correct, and if so, whether that ramshackle old house has been completely overhauled?"

"Most assuredly it was thoroughly searched some years ago," answered Mr. Grimmall, "by myself and my clerk, but I am not so sure about the outhouses and shed; and it is just that point which, in spite of the absurdity of the thing, caught my attention. Shawburton was an eccentric old man, and as you have kindly taken an interest in the subject, I had better tell you the bare facts.

"He started in life as a doctor, set up in practice in Bristol, his native city; but unexpectedly inheriting a handsome fortune, he confined himself to the scientific side of his profession; was a diligent student of natural history, ornithology, comparative anatomy, and the rest of it. He married, but his happiness was short-lived, and soon after his wife's death, which happened at the birth of their only child—a girl—he purchased the small tenement which had long stood unoccupied in these hills. He added to it, and lived there the life of a recluse, devoting himself more than ever to his scientific pursuits. An elderly woman-servant and a nurse for the baby were the only other occupants. As the latter grew up, the nurse was discharged; he educated his child himself, and she grew to woman's estate, literally without having seen more of the world than is visible from the ridge of these hills. Naturally at last she rebelled, ran away, and got married to a young scamp of a shopman at Great Colvern by the name of Harling, who had his eye on my old client's purse. But he reckoned without his host—the old man could not be conciliated. Harling set up in business for himself in the town, but soon came to his wits'-end, failed, and died suddenly, when his boy was three years old. The poor woman was left penniless; her father refused to take her back—refused to do anything more than provide for her child, with whom, after lengthened negotiations, which I conducted, she consented to part, and he was

placed in an infant-school at Bristol. After repeated applications to her father for assistance she, too, disappeared, and has never since been heard of. What became of her is a mystery. Consequently we have never been able to prove her death. Shawburton grew more and more eccentric as years went on; he shut himself up entirely, never went out, or his old servant either, and no one was allowed to enter the house. He probably pursued his scientific fads to the end, for I ascertained he had a large quantity of chemicals sent to him from Bristol, and amongst other curious things an enormous roll of sheet-lead.

"The old man's property—a very pretty one—was in the Three per Cents., and when he first withdrew from the world he gave me a power of attorney to receive the dividends and pay them into his Bristol bank. I also managed what other trifles of business had to be done for him—such as looking after his grandson, and his eventual schooling, etc., of which I gave him by letter a bi-annual report, and which he duly acknowledged by two lines, and beyond this I do not believe he had any concern with the post whatever. I should also say that when he married nearly forty years ago, I drew his will, by which he bequeathed everything to his wife, and at her death to her children. At her death, therefore, his baby-daughter became his heir, and, as Mrs. Harling, should have inherited on the decease of the old man; but we couldn't find her. As I have told you, she was never seen after her boy was taken away from her, fully four years before her father departed this life."

"Under what circumstances did he die?" I here enquired.

Mr. Grimnall resumed:

"Under circumstances which complicated matters greatly. To my intense surprise, I one day received a letter from him saying that he desired to make a fresh will, that he was coming into Bristol to see me for the purpose, and that he was coming three days on. But he did not come in three, in six, or in nine days, and for a good reason—he was lying dying at Dereford, to which place he had gone in the carrier's cart from Colvern, to catch the coach for Bristol; there was no railway in those days. He had locked up his house, having two days previously packed off his old woman-servant to London, where we lost all trace of her. Well, by the time I reached Dereford, whither I

was summoned by the old man's request when he was first taken ill there at an obscure inn, he was dead. You can hardly conceive, therefore, a more difficult state of affairs to deal with. By his will he had made me and his wife his executors, and of course I was the only surviving one. My first step was to find Mrs. Harling, and I naturally expected to gain some information about her at her father's house. I went over, and then for the first time learned that the house was shut up—empty, deserted! That was twelve years ago; the boy was then about six.

"There was nothing left for us but" to throw the case into Chancery. I was appointed by the court guardian of the child, etc., and at the expiration of seven years after Mrs. Harling's disappearance, my powers were renewed. The proof of her death would be satisfactory from the mere sentimental point of view, though I am not a man of much sentiment myself, and it is rather tiresome to find it developing in this youngster. Up to about a year ago he was a commonplace sort of lad enough, but since then the masters tell me he has strangely altered, grown very obstinate and self-willed, and, they say, stupid. He has been at constant odds with them, especially about smoking. I shall be glad when he is off my hands."

"Meanwhile," I suggested, "would there be any objection to our humouring him in the matter of searching the shed? One has heard of curious discoveries made through wild dreams or fancies. It is said that 'in all countries there is a vague belief in the second-sight, conceded both to the insane and to those who are on the threshold of death.' Perhaps I hold this belief, and as it seems to me the lad is verging on the first of these two conditions, it might be wise to let what is called common-sense concede something to superstition."

A sardonic smile crossed Mr. Grimnall's face as he replied: "Oh, by all means. As I have said, I caught at the idea that the outhouse might not have been examined, and although it is rather late in the day to begin a re-investigation, I am quite willing. The fact is, I may have been lukewarm and dilatory in the business. It gave me a great deal of unprofitable trouble at the outset, and one forgets how time flies, and how boys grow into men."

"Good," said I. "You are on your way to Sedbury then to look up young

Mr. Harling; therefore, suppose you bring him back here, and let us all three undertake the exploration together."

Once more, to pass over details, my project was carried out in a few hours. Beneath a lowering sky and in a drizzling rain we three approached the obscure little domain, this time from the road, by the pathway through the copse. The lad led the way eagerly, but in silence, round to the dilapidated outhouse or shed. He was perfectly cool and collected, the courage of that dreamlike state of exaltation, which he described as possessing him when he paid his visit to the spot, having returned. He took the lead with the air of one well-knowing what he was about. He felt himself, he told me afterwards, unconsciously guided. The much-decayed door was only secured by a rusty padlock, the hasp of which yielded to a slight wrench. The place was a mere hovel or tool-house, built of weather-boarding, the soundest part seeming to be the roof. It might well have been passed over in any previous examination of the premises, as not likely to yield any revelation of importance concerning the owner. Light found no access into it except through the open doorway. Dust, mildew, and cobwebs lay thick on everything, and a faint, musty smell assailed the nostrils. Few words were spoken. By common consent, as it seemed, Mr. Grimnall and myself left everything to Harling. He appeared to have no doubt what to do. Occupying a large space of the interior stood a kind of solid carpenter's bench, or enormous rough wooden chest. The light fell straight down upon the flat top, which was about the only space in the place unencumbered with a litter of small boxes, broken baskets, tools, mouldy, discoloured papers, and worm-eaten nondescript objects. After looking around him for a minute, as if for an implement available for his purpose, the lad found a rusty chisel and mallet, lying in a corner with other carpenter's tools; and without hesitation proceeded to prise up the top of the bench. It offered considerable resistance, but presently it slid aside, being fitted accurately to the chest, and only held tight by the incrustation of the dust of years. The interior thus partially revealed to Harling, but invisible to us standing near the doorway, produced this startling exclamation from him: "I knew it; I knew it was her voice, and here she lies, found by me as promised. Yes, mother, I will give you rest!"

Mr. Grimnall and I stepped forward, and, gazing into the aperture, dimly beheld beneath a pane of glass a human face. Startled and aghast we drew back for a moment, looking uncertainly at each other, whilst Harling bent his head reverently close down over his discovery.

I do not pretend to describe all that followed. The lawyer and myself had not expected anything so startling as this, and how we next went to work to assure ourselves that our eyes were not deceiving us, matters not. In the end we verified the fact that the bench or chest contained the embalmed remains of Mrs. Harling, enclosed and hermetically sealed in a roughly-made leaden coffin, with a pane of glass let in over the head so as to show the face, which, strangely well preserved, and seen by the dim light, looked terribly life-like. Grimnall recognised her after but little examination, and his evidence in connection with the surrounding circumstances was, after much circumlocution, accepted by the Court of Chancery as proof of her death.

But when the poor woman had returned to her father's house; how or why this eccentric method of dealing with all that was mortal of her had been resorted to; when or how she died, there was no direct evidence to show, and we never discovered any. It was not difficult, however, to imagine. The solitary and secluded life of old Shawburton, together with his scientific propensities and the peculiarities of his character, would account for all. Doubtless after a while, and unknown to anyone save his old servant, he had taken his daughter back and thenceforth kept her as close a prisoner as himself. There was no reason for suspecting any foul play. Her death probably arose from natural causes, which, as a medical man, her father could deal with, and, when it occurred, he simply exercised upon her remains the skill he had displayed in preserving and embalming certain specimens of the dumb portion of creation.

That her spirit, however, in some wise influenced the mind of her son seems pretty clear to me after my experience of him. But into this question I do not go. With the discovery, and after his mother's body had been reverently laid in the little country churchyard of Colvern Wells, the cloud lifted from the lad's brain, and I have reason to know that he has not apparently inherited any of the eccentricities of his grandfather.

Of course the affair made some stir in the

neighbourhood ; various garbled accounts of it were spread far and wide, but whilst the noises attributed to the lonely house were held to have been sufficiently accounted for by the presence of the embalmed remains in the shed, their eventual disposal in a fitting resting-place naturally quieted the troubled spirit, and no one was surprised thenceforth at the place ceasing to be haunted.

I revisited the hills a few years afterwards, when "Old Shawburton's" itself even had disappeared.

AMONG THE HILLS.

I.

SOMEWHERE in South Germany, on the borders of three different countries, the railway-lines converge at a station which would in England be an important junction, but which there is a humble erection, content with one platform. The long-suffering passengers, when they alight, have to make their way with their baggage across the metals, in front of snorting engines and behind heavily-laden trucks, unless, indeed, they are fortunate enough to belong to the infrequent trains which draw up at the platform itself.

One burning day in August, the passengers were waiting with extraordinary patience for leave to remount into the carriages which they could plainly see before their longing eyes in inviting nearness, with only two railway-lines and a luggage-truck between them. There was very little shade upon the platform, but a young lady had taken advantage of the small amount thrown by a projecting ledge, and was seated upon her box calmly surveying the scene before her.

No one could for an instant have mistaken her nationality ; long before her fellow-passengers had come near enough to see the clear-cut features and steady blue eyes, they had shrugged their shoulders over the fact that she was an unmistakable Englishwoman.

She was quite young—probably not more than twenty—and quite alone, yet the peculiarities of her position did not affect her in the least, for she was brooding over her secret wrongs, and wondering why she had been turned out of the train which the officials had acknowledged was the one in which she was to proceed. She had tried to insist upon remaining in her

shelter, but had been compelled to descend, under the threat of being ignominiously hauled out.

The affair had by no means disconcerted her ; she endured the accidents of life with singular equanimity. Even her latest exploit had not one whit ruffled her composure, although the victim of it was still casting contemptuous glances at her from the other end of the platform.

He was a well-looking, but somewhat corpulent major, whose undress uniform, resembling, as it did, the costume of the railway officials, had induced the young lady to consult him on some point connected with her recent wrongs. His natural indignation, expressed by the stiff manner in which he drew his heels together and saluted the culprit, had not been soothed by the young lady's calm explanation, in distinct if ungrammatical German, that it was very strange, she was very sorry, but he was so exactly like a guard that she could not help the mistake.

Rosalind Tracy's little stock of patience was slowly ebbing, for the sun was growing hotter, and the platform dustier, every moment, when the small remnant was put to a fresh trial. A door suddenly opened, and a fierce German official flew out something after the fashion of a jack-in-the-box.

"Not so near the edge," he thundered to Rosalind, who started to her feet, not knowing whether she was in imminent danger from a lunatic. After eyeing him over for a moment, she sat down again, turning her back upon the line, and thus obeying his mandate.

"Move your box too," went on the inexorable official in similar tones ; but this was too much.

"My good man," said the young lady, rising and closing her sunshade as if she were preparing for battle, "I am in no danger. I am not near the edge of the platform. I will not budge an inch," this with extreme clearness of articulation ; "neither will I move my box. You had better go away, for I think you a singularly uncivil and disagreeable specimen of an uncivil and disagreeable class."

Her words being English would have had little effect, but her tone being extremely gentle and quiet, produced the result she desired, for the official imagined that she was offering an apology for her conduct, and retired as suddenly as he had appeared.

"I think," she said very sweetly to the

fellow-passenger who happened to be next her when they had all been allowed to climb into their carriages again; "I think the German railway officials ought to be sent to England for a time."

As her neighbour chanced to be the officer she had already offended, he only glowered more fiercely than before, not vouchsafing any answer because he could find none sufficiently crushing.

But if he would not talk to his fellow-traveller, everyone else would. The elderly lady eating cherries was equally surprised and delighted to find from Rosalind's account that such fruit grew also in England. The old, smiling German professor took quite a fatherly interest in the route Rosalind was following, and in the means by which she was to reach her journey's end. His interest reached to the pitch of excitement when he found that a carriage was to meet her at Niederhofen, in which she was to travel to her destination among the hills.

"Remember," he cried in a perfect fever, "only two thalers for Trinkgeld!"

These were the last words Rosalind heard as the train moved out of the station, leaving her and her box alone upon the platform. The advice, excellent as it was, was superfluous, for when, after waving an adieu to the train in general, and her stout friend in particular, she proceeded to search for her conveyance, she found nothing but a yellow-bodied "post-wagon," with two thin, wiry little horses fastened to the coach by an ingenious harness of leather and rope. The driver, who seemed to combine the offices of guard and coachman, was dressed in a smart light blue uniform, and wore the royal arms upon his cap.

Rosalind had profited sufficiently by her former mistake to be cautious in addressing him, and whilst she hesitated, her difficulties were suddenly solved for her by an English voice at her side:

"Excuse me, but you are surely English, and are going to Oberhofen?"

"You are quite right," was the reply, "although," the young lady added to herself, "I don't know how you guessed either fact."

Some men would have been abashed at the girl's coolness, and at the steady, critical look of her blue eyes, but Claude Errol was only spurred on to further exertion by the consciousness that the face which looked up at him was young and singularly pretty, and that here was an excellent opportunity

for displaying his command over the German language.

"My uncle and I are going to Oberhofen in the diligence, and will make it all right with the coachman."

Whereupon he poured forth a long story in voluble North German, which the official received quite heedlessly, standing at some distance from Mr. Errol, and occasionally flicking off with his whip a more than usually obtrusive piece of dust from the harness. His composure was not altogether assumed. Claude's German was about as intelligible to him as Hebrew, and although he was aware that the young Englishman was volubly explaining and expostulating, he took no pains to understand the matter in hand, for he considered an attitude of explanation and expostulation as the normal condition of that extraordinary race.

"It is all right, I have settled it," said Errol triumphantly. "We had taken the two box-seats, now you are to have one, and either my uncle or I will go inside."

Rosalind thanked him, without, however, expressing in her words either the gratitude or admiration which he felt to be his due. Then she suddenly turned to an older man who had been standing in the background, and asked him with a certain graceful air of confidential intimacy:

"Do you really think this will be my best way of reaching Oberhofen?"

The man she addressed started a little. He was not much accustomed to find women turn from his handsome, smiling, self-satisfied nephew to himself, but he soon recovered himself, and answered her question; no human being had ever turned to Arnold Eyre for help, and received less than he demanded, for the giver always offered full measure, pressed down, and running over.

"I believe it is your only means of getting there," he made reply, in a tone which formed a strange contrast with the younger man's bearing. "It is more than fifteen miles from here, and it is impossible to obtain a carriage."

"But I really don't like to take your place, and I can easily go inside."

"We are delighted to give it up to you. Pray say no more about it."

He used the first person plural, but Rosalind noticed that it was he who got inside, whilst Claude helped her up to the elevated perch which formed an enlarged coach-box. Before she could take her seat, however, she was startled by a sudden

scream of despair. A stout, spectacled German, who had been bidding an affectionate good-bye to a large circle of acquaintances, suddenly darted forwards and snatched hold of Miss Tracy's dress.

"Ach, meine Blumen!" he cried, as soon as his horror could find words.

And then Rosalind discovered the cause of his terror in a little square brown-paper parcel which he had placed on the box, and which he had feared she might crush. These having been rescued from danger, his wife placed in the inside of the coach, and he having climbed to Rosalind's side, he found words to express his sorrow for having startled her, apologies which were graciously received by Rosalind, but taken a little sulkily by Mr. Errol, who kept up a running commentary in English on the German's excuses.

At last the coachman climbed to the foot-board, where he sat with his feet dangling close to the horses' hind legs, and the coach started at a trot up the valley. The incline was gentle, for the river flowed steadily to meet them at about ten feet below their road. There was little to be seen but the fields in the valley, which gradually narrowed as they went on, the pastures at the foot of the mountains on the other side, and the rugged peaks above, with a little sparse snow scattered here and there upon the rocky surface. Sometimes as the road wound in and out, the travellers caught a glimpse of a couple of hamlets far up the valley, looking as if the wooden houses and churches of a toy village had been dropped by some giant child at his play. The German beside Rosalind was in ecstasies, and at every bit of steep ascent which slackened the horses' pace he took considerable trouble to assure his wife, who put her head out of window to listen to his words, that the view was lovely, the air heavenly in its freshness, and that he was perfectly happy, and he would wind up these oft-repeated statements by an outburst of sentiment.

"I only wish, my beloved, that there was room here for thee also."

It was partly to drown Mr. Errol's muttered and uncomplimentary comments on this display of conjugal devotion that Rosalind turned to the speaker and said in her best German:

"I am very sorry I nearly crushed your flowers; but really you should not do up flowers so as to look like——" She paused for a simile.

"Mouse-traps!" suggested the German

in excellent English, with a merry smile and a certain gleam of triumph in his eyes as he glanced past Rosalind at the Englishman beyond her. "Well, no, perhaps not."

Rosalind thought of giving him a little advice as to the really best method of carrying flowers, but then, taking a silent survey of his appearance, she decided he was too old to learn. She never doubted her own capacity for teaching. Indeed, the most superficial observer would have seen that she came from a home where her excellent theories concerning life and its problems had never been put to the cruel test of experience.

"Is not this nice?" she said, turning to Claude, her face bright from the cooling mountain breeze which swept down the valley, and her eyes bright with a light which was no reflected sunshine. "Feel how delicious the wind is, and look at the glitter on the snow!"

"The horses are the most miserable screws I ever saw," grumbled the young man.

"But think how much we should miss if we went faster. Look, I can see a wild strawberry on the bank, and there is an old man going in at his cottage door; and see, there, his grandson running out to meet him."

"I don't see much to admire in the couple, I must say," Claude answered with perhaps just a shade of contempt in his voice. "They are neither handsome nor presumably clean."

The girl he addressed did not reply to him, she did not even deign to look at him, but directed all the rest of her conversation to her other companion.

"She has a morbid taste for age, ugliness, and infirmity," yawned young Errol to himself with a complacent sense that no one could consider him as a concrete illustration of any of these terms.

Meanwhile within the coach, which was hot and closely packed with marketwomen and their baskets, Mr. Eyre consoled himself with the thought that the two young people up above were thoroughly enjoying themselves.

II.

The arrival of the coach at Oberhofen has been so unfortunately timed by the Government, whose mails it carries, that its daily rattle over the stones does not arouse a proper degree of interest, or secure a fair amount of attention. At eight o'clock

every German in the place—and the place is full of Germans—is engaged in ordering, eating, or digesting his supper, and no light or frivolous amusement is allowed by him to interfere with the solemn duties of his life. Consequently the coach is not received by an excited and admiring crowd, although on this particular evening one lady was awaiting its arrival with considerable interest, which was fully reciprocated by the English girl on the coach-box. She smiled and nodded, and nodded and smiled, alternately, whilst all the time she kept up a brisk conversation with her German friend, who was much interested, as all kindly Germans are, in her family history, and the story of her aunt Mary, with whom she was going to spend a month at Oberhofen. He was stout and elderly, but he managed to climb down from his perch and help her after him, before Claude had found his knapsack and fishing-rod and remembered her existence.

It was a pleasant sight, both he and Arnold Eyre thought, to see how the faces of the two women brightened as they clasped hands.

"My dear child, I am sorry there was no carriage to meet you, but the people here have no consciences, or if they have any they give them leave of absence during the season, for they are always promising what they cannot perform. I find old Vogel, our landlord, had solemnly undertaken to provide four people with carriages this afternoon, and had then sent out the only one he possessed to carry in the hay-harvest. I hope you did not have an uncomfortable drive."

"Oh no, not a bit; somebody gave up," Rosalind made answer; then suddenly interrupting herself: "But I forgot something." As she spoke she started off at a quick walk in pursuit of her fellow-travellers, who were already dispersing to their homes. Arnold Eyre turned at the sound of her hurrying feet, so different from the clattering walk of the peasants, or the military tread of the male visitors at Oberhofen.

"Oh, I beg your pardon," an eager voice said, as she came up with him, "but I quite forgot to thank you for giving up your place to me—it was very good of you, and I felt all the while that if I had not gone inside, your nephew ought to have done it, for he is the younger."

She spoke in her usual clear accents, heedless whether or not she should be overheard, or, perhaps, wishful that her

words should reach Mr. Errol's ears. As he went on his way, apparently without noticing or hearing them, he indulged in a small, contemptuous smile at the young lady's attempt to make herself of importance.

"I was delighted to give up my place to you," said Arnold, smiling down kindly on her eagerness, and a little amused at her rebuke. "I hope you both enjoyed your drive."

On which, Rosalind fell to wondering, with feminine perversity, whether she might not have enjoyed the society of the uncle more than that of the nephew.

It was a question she often had occasion to ask herself during the following days, for the four English people were naturally drawn together by the bond of a common nationality, and still more of a common language, and in the excursions they made together the young lady found herself frequently and naturally the companion of the young gentleman, whilst Mr. Eyre helped Mrs. Gilmore up and down steep paths, over mountain brooks, and into the shadiest nooks on the hillside.

"Poor Mr. Eyre! he is so kind and attentive," she often said to her niece. "Poor Mr. Eyre!" Rosalind had got used to the epithet, and though she had at first resented its use, she had learnt to tolerate it since she had heard his story—the story of a treachery once freely forgiven and forgotten by him, only to be renewed when its repetition crushed him with overwhelming force. His wife had long been in her grave, but the result of her misdoing was not laid with her in that quiet cemetery where he had stood by her coffin. An experience, which would have made many men distrustful of the world and cynical concerning human nature, had only given Arnold a profound mistrust of himself and an abiding sense that the happiness he had missed through life was a happiness he had never deserved. Not that he ever posed as a melancholy hero pursued by a fatal destiny; on the contrary, he had been eager to seize and hold any fragment of gladness which came in his way. Rosalind liked to tell him any story about her journey and its adventures, for his face suddenly changed its character, and the light of honest laughter lit up his kind, sad, grey eyes.

Perhaps it was the result of finding her little jests so well received and her smiles so welcome; perhaps it was the natural perversity of human nature which resented the compulsory nature of her companion-

ship with the younger man; or perhaps it was a subtler unconscious joy in bringing back happiness to the heart where it had so long been a stranger—but whatever were Rosalind's motives she found very soon that she preferred Arnold's society to Claude's, and she would reckon up at the end of the day, in the most simple and innocent triumph imaginable, how many times she had been able to talk to him, and how often she had made him laugh.

Breakfast was over at the Golden Eagle. The comfortless room, with its long tables covered with oilcloth, looked more miserable than usual from the half emptied coffee-cups and scattered remnants of bread-and-honey. A few Germans were smoking, the women were knitting, and the atmosphere was growing every minute more insupportable from the odour of tobacco and want of ventilation. The resources of the room were soon exhausted: a couple of German newspapers, one of which Errol was reading as he lingered over his breakfast, an engraving of the Emperor, and a list of the hotels in Munich, did not form an enchanting whole. Outside the rain was descending in a gentle shower, which hardly seemed more than a Scotch mist, but which had thoroughly cleared the one street of the village.

"I can bear it no longer," cried Rosalind, as a fifth German lighted his pipe; "rain, hail, and thunder would be better than this; besides, I believe the clouds are lifting."

She walked out of the house into the fresh, moist air without pausing to see whether anyone was following her. Her aunt never looked up from the letter she was writing, and Claude was far too engrossed in his paper to notice her departure; only Arnold Eyre took up a fleecy shawl of Mrs. Gillmore's, and followed the girl out of the room.

"I was afraid you would find it chilly after the close air down there," he said, almost apologising for his presence, when he found her standing under the overhanging balcony which sheltered the steps of the hotel.

She looked up at him with a smile which was at once an unspoken "thank you," and an invitation to stay, and the unconscious expression of feeling seemed to overflow and drown the deliberate one.

The rain gradually ceased falling, and a few peasant-women passed to and fro intent upon some farm-work; on the left a stone monument, such as one may find in

nearly every German village, recorded the names of some of those who had fallen asleep in the midst of a victory they had died to gain, but were never to know or to share.

"I think these monuments show one better than any history what war really is," said Rosalind softly. "When this little village lost ten men, how many more there must have been taken away from their mothers and their homes! How the people here must have waited and watched and prayed for those who were never to come back again!"

Arnold looked at her tenderly, he had not before heard her speak so solemnly, and he never guessed—how should he?—that it was some chance words of his, spoken over-night, which had set her thinking about the obscure rank-and-file of whom the world can of necessity give no history.

"Only, perhaps," she went on in a musing tone, "it is better to die so than to live to grow old among the hills here, and to find life every year more empty and barren of happiness."

She was looking at an old villager—lean, worn, and wrinkled—who was hobbling by, leaning on his thick stick.

Arnold Eyre answered her unspoken thought.

"Life's prizes do seem unequally divided," he began, and then paused—a sudden sense of the contrast between those two who were speaking overcame him. Young, bright, beautiful, happy, and beloved, she seemed hardly to belong to the same order of beings as the grey-haired, prematurely aged man beside her.

"But after all," he went on very gently, and rather lamely, as a man is sure to do when he tries to reduce the theories which rule his life into words which shall explain them to indifferent ears, "when all hope of personal happiness is over, there is always a great deal to live for; things often turn out rightly, and one sees other people happy and enjoying themselves."

She turned away her head with a little sob in her throat, which he took for a laugh at the simplicity of his theory. It was absurd for him to expect that a happy child, eager to take a prominent part in life's drama, should understand the quieter pleasure to be derived from a passive contemplation of the rush and hurry of the stage. But there was no laughter in Rosalind's heart, only a tender pity and a passionate sense of rebellion against the

decree he had inferred, if not openly pronounced—that his life was to be henceforward barren of personal happiness or of any joy but that reflected from richer and fuller lives.

III.

If the number of chapels in any place be taken as a fair test of the religious feeling of the community, the inhabitants of Oberhofen must be amongst the most devout Christians in Europe. Besides a large church in the centre of the village, there are many little chapels scattered here and there about the meadows, and innumerable shrines where the richly-coloured crucifix or saint is protected from the rain by a projecting ledge, whilst the worshipper kneels on a flat stone by the roadside. The largest of these is situated on a hill—the Calvarien-berg—a little distance from the village. A chapel originally stood upon the summit, but this has given place to a highly-coloured and very realistic life-size group representing the scene on Calvary. The steep zig-zags which ascend the hill may have intentionally been made difficult and unattractive with a view of forming a kind of penitential stair for the faithful; but if this was the intention of the designer, it must be owned that the public is unwilling to take advantage of his forethought. Few persons are ever to be met breasting the ascent.

"And they show their sense," cried Mrs. Gillmore, pausing for breath at the corner of one of the zig-zags. "Why did you two ever persuade me to try and get up here? It is not fit for old people to venture upon such perilous enterprises."

"Why, here comes Age itself to contradict your assertion," said Claude Errol, laughing, as a bent figure suddenly appeared at the corner of the zig-zag above them.

She was a very old woman, but she was energetic and cheery, for she was engaged in steering down the incline a small sleigh heavily laden with broken bits of wood, and she was smiling over a task which would have woefully tried most tempers and most backs. Whenever the sleigh could go wrong it did—it stopped dead, it turned over on its side, it ran into the bank, and it showed a perverse desire at the turn of the zig-zag to continue its path straight down to the valley. But its guide displayed neither impatience nor disgust, and, when she passed the strangers,

turned upon them such a beaming face of good-humoured happiness that Rosalind was irresistibly reminded of her talk with Arnold Eyre.

"I wonder where your uncle can be?" she said, turning abruptly to Claude, who was watching with an amused smile the desperate efforts of the old peasant to pilot her convoy round the corner.

"Probably somewhere at the top. Anyhow, he won't lose himself," was the dry answer.

Mr. Errol felt that Miss Tracy's interest was misplaced. But as they finished their ascent, the concern was transferred from her voice to his.

"By Jove! what is he doing?"

Arnold Eyre had taken off his coat, and was endeavouring with a clumsy axe and a not over-skilful arm to break up into pieces an old wooden door which lay upon the ground.

"What a queer fellow he is!" sighed Errol; "and yet, Miss Tracy, his heart is as good as gold."

Rosalind turned away impatiently; this was not the first occasion on which Errol had apologised for or explained his uncle's conduct. Why would everyone persist in imagining that she was incapable of appreciating real greatness of character?

Arnold Eyre stopped his work, but did not lay down his axe.

"Did you meet the old lady dragging down her supply of firewood? She has the priest's permission to carry away this old door, and I found her tapping at it with a hammer and chisel with a view to breaking it up before Christmas."

"It was a pity to rob her of her amusement," said Claude a little sulkily.

He heard footsteps approaching, and who could tell which of his eligible acquaintance might find him and his uncle in this strange situation?

But it was only the old woman, who reappeared smiling, with her empty sleigh, and whose smiles widened into positive laughter as she watched the well-intentioned but misdirected energies of the English gentleman, who never paused except to make a joke in unintelligible German, but with an easily-understood smile.

Mrs. Gillmore watched him with ill-concealed anxiety, lest he should slice off his foot or his leg in one of his unpractised strokes.

Claude looked on divided between anger

and contempt, whilst Rosalind's thoughts were less easy to determine, for she never turned her eyes from the axe which scattered the chips on to her gown and over her head.

When the work was done she crossed to where Claude was standing apart.

"Now," she said in her quick, rather commanding tones, "you had better put the wood on the sleigh and drag it down the hill."

At the manifest absurdity of this proposition everyone laughed aloud, and the old woman, who had just understood Eyre's demand for a trinket, laughed loudest of all, but there was no smile on Rosalind's face, and no merriment in her heart.

IV.

It was a fête-day in the village—a new bowling-green and drinking-saloon were to be opened, and the people of the surrounding country, to whom Oberhofen represented all the bustle and dissipation of a great city, were assembling in considerable numbers. The deputations from one or two more important villages were accompanied by noisy brass bands, and the whole place was astir with sound and colour, for flags were fluttering from every roof and from many windows. Rosalind had run away from the village to a hill at a little distance in order to try and sketch the place under its new aspect, but the scene had been too lively for her pencil, and she had shut up her sketch-book in despair. Still, her eyes were fixed upon the field at her feet; it looked like a large graveyard with its innumerable wooden crosses, except that here and there a wisp of hay was still clinging to the bar, where it had been hung to dry during the second hay-harvest, now all gathered in. Suddenly she caught sight of a figure advancing rapidly towards her, and she sprang to her feet with a vague foreboding of evil, which strengthened as Claude approached. His face was the face of a man who brings momentous news.

"I felt I must come after you to say good-bye," he began hurriedly, noticing the strained look in her eyes; "a summons has come from home, and our pleasant party is broken up."

Rosalind did not answer, the blood slowly deserted her cheek, and surged back to her heart. Seeing her sudden pallor, Claude's heart softened, and his voice with it.

"I am afraid I startled you, but I had

very little time; the telegram only arrived ten minutes ago, and though there is no bad news, still there is hardly time for more than good-bye."

Still she did not speak, for her heart was full of one question—why had he come alone?

"Don't forget me, Rosalind," he said, drawing closer to her and taking her hand; "I wish with all my heart I were not going, but I must not stay longer even to talk to you, for I have got to find my uncle, and say good-bye to him before I start."

"Oh," she cried with the sudden involuntary joy of one from whom a heavy load is lifted; "oh, then it is only you who are going?"

His face seemed to have caught the colour hers had lost, and for one moment the two looked mutely at one another, a whole world of meaning in their eyes. Then, when wounded vanity let him speak, he said with an angry laugh:

"Oh yes, it is only I. Perhaps I had better have spared myself the trouble of coming here to bid you good-bye."

If the moment that had betrayed her secret to him was also the first moment of her own consciousness, she had the self-control to answer him with dignity:

"It was very good of you to come—good-bye, and bon voyage."

She held out her hand as she spoke, and he must needs take it, but he dropped it in a moment, and she turned away, not to the village, but to the wooded path which led to the hill beyond. Claude watched her disappear, and then made his way back to the hotel, his heart full of bitterness, which would not be subdued. Only just as his uncle wrung his hand, and he prepared to spring into the cart-like carriage which was to take him to Niederhofen, he managed to say:

"Uncle, I left Miss Tracy up by the Marien Chapel. I think it would be kind if you would go and fetch her home."

The consciousness that he was, after all, a singularly generous young fellow considerably soothed Claude's feelings as he drove down the valley.

Arnold Eyre, meanwhile, strode across the field and up the hill with a strange misgiving at his heart. The task of consolation which his nephew had laid upon him was hard enough, even without the added difficulty he experienced in his underlying consciousness that, had he been Claude, he would have deputed no one to

such an office. But as he went on his way he trampled his personal feelings under foot, and lost himself in the thought of how he could best console the girl whose happy face had seemed for a time to lend his own life some of its brightness.

The door of the little chapel was half open, and he could see her within, upon her knees, her face buried in her hands. He almost fancied that he could hear her sob. Some of us know how sad it is to stand without the holy place of those we love, and feel that we dare not enter in, even to pray with or comfort them. Arnold stood a little way from the door and waited. He studied the little pictures on the wall, painted to commemorate some wonderful escape or terrible calamity. In one recess the bull in fierce pursuit of a frightened couple was checked in full career by a red-hot cannon-ball thrown from the hand of a patron saint. But the tragedy was close by the comedy, and it did not need the pitiful German words to explain the pathos of the clumsy, grotesque pictures where the mountaineer was falling over a precipice, grasping the edelweiss in his hand, or where the lime-burner was buried beneath a huge heap of chalk and stones.

Rosalind had been conscious of some presence near her as she knelt in the little chapel; but she had imagined it was only some passer-by who had paused for a short prayer, and she started violently when she came out and found herself face to face with Arnold. All his cautious schemes, all his forethought, deserted him as he caught sight of her face with its disturbed look and sad eyes.

"Miss Tracy, Claude sent me to you. You were his last thought as he started."

He had never before known her without a ready answer and a bright look. This must be more than mere sorrow at a short parting from her young lover. He forgot himself entirely in his ardent desire to console her.

"My dear," he said, taking her hand and drawing it through his arm, "you must let me take you home. You are over-tired and over-wrought. Claude, too, went away in low spirits; but it will not be long before you meet again, and then——"

He had spent the better part of his life in ministering to others, and forgot himself. So well had he learnt his lesson that he almost convinced himself that the desire of his heart was to see these

two reunited. Small wonder if the girl to whom he spoke should have believed it too.

She snatched her hand from under his arm, and sprang away a pace or two, looking him full in the face with burning cheeks and fiery eyes.

"How dare you say that?" she cried with fierce resentment in her tone and bearing. "Do you, too, think that I care?"

But before she could finish her sentence her voice broke into passionate sobs, and the tears were making their unaccustomed way down her cheeks. Arnold Eyre's self-reproach was almost stronger than he could bear. What right had he to touch upon her heart's secret?—her despair and her joy were alike remote from him. As she sank down upon the grassy bank and hid her face among the tall ferns, he knelt by her side and uttered broken words, not so much intended to soothe her as to justify himself.

She could not think that he meant to pain her, he who would die to shield her from harm, he who loved her better than any earthly thing. All his hopes, crushed almost as soon as formed, all his love in its tenderness, its despair, rushed from his lips, not in a coherent speech, but in a series of broken sentences which emotion made almost inaudible—but there are moments in life when eloquence is independent of words.

Rosalind's sobs ceased gradually, then she slowly lifted her head and looked at him with a child's trust and a woman's love shining out of her beautiful eyes.

"Do you really think," she asked with a softness and humility which were both strange in one of her fearless bearing; "do you really think that I am good enough to make you happy?"

The evening twilight had fallen, and the fête was over when they returned to the village, but there were still loiterers at the corner of the street, and a few children were playing on the threshold of their homes. One of these ran up to the pair, and put her soft hand in that of the English lady; and another, bolder than the rest, stretched up her tiny warm fingers into the tall gentleman's palm. Neither Arnold nor Rosalind felt that there was anything strange in the action; the sweet evening dusk-light which drew in around them, and hid them from enquiring eyes, was full of love and confidence.

IN THE SPRING-TIME.

I.

ACROSS the strip of silver sea from Lymington lies the demure little red-brick town of Yarmouth. In summer-time the water is brisk with lively freight, but in grey March weather the daily steamer from the mainland is often the only speck to be seen on the clean expanse of sea. Now and again, to be sure, a stately ship, incoming or outward bound, passes along the Solent, but leaves the gap empty as before.

Inshore, too, in the small, clean, tidy streets, there is a compact and orderly look, like the decks of a smartly-officered ship. There is new paint on the low red-tiled cottages, a spick-and-span air about the natty little front-gardens, with their trim wooden palings and rows of geranium-pots, and the air of a Dutch picture in the little, snug inner courts, where you may find an old salt doing a bit of carpentering or mending a fishing-net, while an old cat blinks benignly from a cottage door. There is an old-world air of peace about the little place, a restful, almost Quakerish air, which seems to belong to another age.

Railways and tramways, with their noise and bustle, are not; the sighing of wind and wave, with the monotonous cawing of the rooks from the churchyard elms, are almost the only sounds that break the stillness. Neither summer nor winter alter much the surface-life of this quaint little town. Only the short, dark days bring wind, and sometimes snow, from the downs across the marshes, while the spring brings the warm, genial sun even before the birds build or the trees show their tender buds. June and December indeed find Yarmouth unchanged; the tide of cockney visitors go elsewhere, or at most pass down the pier and take coach in the lumbering old conveyance which plies between Freshwater Gate and the more northern-lying town.

The arrival or departure of this cumbersome vehicle, as in other small places, is the life and soul of the day. The coachman brings parcels and gossip, as well as passengers, from the other end of the island, so that they of Yarmouth gather round the driver with the zest for small news known only to the dwellers of out-lying hamlets. There is also a sharp rivalry on the part of the owners of the two hackney-carriages in which Yarmouth, in the time of need, luxuriates, and which may be seen any day, about the

hour of the arrival of the packet, in the little square or place before the church gate.

It was one blustering, but sunny day, in the early spring, that these worthies respectfully saluted a young girl who had been down the pier to see the arrival of the steamer. Some dozen people, including a couple of men who looked like commercial travellers, and a somewhat dishevelled and sea-sick honeymoon pair, were the only passengers on the boat. This young girl, who was the first to pass the turnstile, was dressed in a simple, dark dress, and wore an air of recent sorrow. Her hair, loosened by the wind, showed itself to be that dark brown colour which is sometimes tinged with auburn, as if the sun had warmed the straying ends. Her brown eyes—eyes that denote a heart full of human sympathies—had a preoccupied look, as if they had focussed their sight to some inner picture, to the exclusion of all other. There was, besides, a set, determined expression about the mouth, and a tinge of ill-health in cheeks which were evidently by nature pale. Her gait, however, was vigorous and firm, her foot clenching the ground at each step with that wholesome grip of earth which denotes the elastic body and lover of open air.

"Be gwine t' th' cottage, miss? If so be, shall be glad to take 'ee," called out the driver of the coach, as he and the hackney-carriage men pressed forward to gain the ear of the scanty passengers as they appeared one by one along the pier from the boat.

"No, thank you, Tom; you may take my shawl and leave it at the cottage as you go past. I shall walk," returned the girl as she put it into the man's hand.

"It's a longish way, miss, you'd best get inside, fur it's like to rain afore night," said the old man, looking to wind-ward.

"Oh no, there will be no rain to-night, Tom. I want to walk home," said the girl.

"Leastways, take this 'ere shawl, we'll ketch you up at the R'yal Garge, and there, p'raps, you'll jump in," reiterated the good-natured old fellow as he wrapped the plaid round her.

In another instant the girl had thanked him with a bright flicker of a smile and had set out on her long walk.

When the little town is once left behind, the road, level and white, lies through a low, boggy tract of land which is covered

by the sea in equinoctial tides. The briny odour of seaweed from the black mud growth, and the cry of the seagulls, add only to the desolate scene. It is a bare, cheerless road, unprotected from summer sun or winter wind, and from it the sea can only be seen as a faint silver streak on the low-lying shore. A mile farther on the ground rises through a graceful clump of trees, and by-and-by, on the spreading gorse-covered downs, a splendid panorama of sky and sea breaks on the view.

The wind dropped as the solitary girl's figure gained the higher ground, and sweet bird-notes from the hedges smote her ear. She had remained hitherto on the high-road, where the passing villagers for the most part saluted her, but now, skirting a village, she broke into a narrow foot-path which ascended a steeply rising down.

The setting sun was gilding the ruddy new-ploughed earth, while behind the high straggling hedge on her left came the plaintive bleating of young lambs. In the hushed air there was a warm, balmy odour, and in the earth a springiness which spoke of wakening life. The pungent earth seemed to heave with its teeming growth, while faint cries from bird and insect in the hedgerows gave further witness to the newly quickened life. Pale primroses and stately golden daffodils were lifting their heads by the wayside, while the delicious warbling of an invisible bird seemed to fill the air with its trembling pulsation. The gently stirring breath of spring wafted a hundred scents over the warm, moist earth, while the last rays of the setting sun bathed the landscape in an indistinct but golden radiance.

Beyond the crest of hill on the descending road into the next village lies a lonely farmhouse, protected on the north side by a dense copse and wood. The nearest habitation is a mile and a half away; the church some three-quarters of a mile as the crow flies.

It was in nearing this lonely homestead, known as the Callows Farm, that the girl heard a distant sound. It was followed in a few minutes by the rustling of the dead leaves and the cracking of twigs in the hedgerow, and then a dog's wet nose saluted her hand with all the usual canine manifestations of joy. At the same moment a gaunter leg appeared over a stile some fifty yards off, and the dog's master—a broad-shouldered young man, dressed in a rough shooting-suit, sprang into the road.

His face was bronzed and singularly open, with its keen blue eyes and cleanly-cut features; but for the moment there was an undeniably listless and vague air in his gait and mien which sat strangely on a man of his physique. The listless air, however, vanished as he caught sight of the girl's figure on the road.

The twilight had begun to fall by this time, and the dense wood overhanging the turn of the road made it seem darker than it really was. The most profound silence reigned. Every bird was hushed; except for the melancholy cawing of some rooks overhead in the tall elm-trees, not a sound broke the stillness. A sort of white mist, too, was creeping up in the hollows, making even near objects blurred and indistinct; only high above the road the grim old trees, with their skeleton arms, loomed against the darkling sky. There was something strange and oppressive in the air—something fantastic and weird in the uncanny half-light. Bats flitted from out the darkness of the thicket with their strange swaying movement. The white road lay lost in the upward-creeping mists.

"Jane Merryweather!" exclaimed the young man, advancing to meet her. "Why are you by yourself on this lonely road at night?"

"The road won't hurt me; I'm accustomed to being alone," she replied curtly, without any form of greeting, and, if anything, quickening her pace.

"Why do you refuse to see me when I call at the cottage? You have changed ever since I went up to town last week," continued the young man as he walked beside her. "Jane, do you do any human being any good by being so strange?"

"I never gave you leave to call me by my christian-name," the girl broke in.

"Well, never mind what name I call you by—that doesn't alter anything. I've been waiting about these three or four days to catch sight of you. You don't think I'm going to let you go now without a word?"

"It won't do any good."

"You were not always so hard on me. What have I done to displease you? Who has come between us? By Heaven! if any man has come between us, and taken you from me, I'll—"

The man did not finish his sentence, but his clenched hand and burning eyes might well have frightened any but the determined young woman at his side.

For some minutes there was silence between the two. They emerged out of the cover of the wood into the high-road, which again led over the downs. It was quite dark now.

Here and there faint stars began to peep through the vaporous sky, but below, over the wide landscape, the earth lay white and shadowy in its veil of mist.

To the right of the road, at a distance of perhaps nearly a quarter of a mile, lay some cottages, whose cheerful lights began now to show through their misty curtain. It was not until the man's eye caught these lights that he again broke the silence.

"Janey, you didn't always dislike me! Surely you remember last summer in the wood," he said, turning to her with a kind of entreaty in his voice. "Surely you didn't hate me then?"

"Last summer is gone," she answered, with a shade of softening in her voice. "I can only speak for the present;" but then, changing her tone suddenly, she added fiercely: "There has been enough of all this—you have no right to follow me."

"Some day you shall care for me!" he exclaimed more fiercely. "You did love, there has been some sort of foul play; you couldn't have changed so. Janey——"

"If you persecute me, I shall simply leave the place, and—and then—you know my aunt is very fond of Yarmouth. Leave me alone, and all this may be forgotten; but if you speak to me again, you will force us to leave."

All this the girl said entreatingly, as if she were trying to believe her own words. There was a break in her voice when she added after a pause:

"I—I am fond of—of the place, too."

"Fond of the place—fond of it!" he muttered to himself. "Why should you ever leave it? Janey," he went on quickly, "why should you ever leave it? Isn't it all yours, if you would only have it? My darling," he went on, seizing her two hands, "couldn't you get a little fond of something besides the place—a little fond of me, Janey? Would it be so hard?"

They had reached by this time the first little trim cottage with its flowering laurestinus, its gravel path, and tidy forget-me-not beds, set roundly in the twin sloping grass-plots.

Often enough the most ordinary and familiar objects have the power, in moments of excitement, to bring us back to our

ordinary selves, to what we may conceive to be our duty, and the more usual tenor of our lives. At such moments we catch at straws, remembering words spoken to us in childhood, and torture significance out of the crowing of a cock or the striking of an hour.

Some such mental conflict seemed to be fighting in the young girl who had now reached the cottage gate. She had turned back for an instant, and suffered her eye to travel over the sleeping landscape. The white mist had crowded up into the hollows of the undulating downs so that the crest of Swallow's Hill, with its dense black wood, looked like some island in a frothy sea. One end of Callows Farm only loomed out of the mass of trees against the pale milky sky. Seawards the little dappled clouds were breaking like foam before a young crescent moon which was rising over a distant ridge of hills.

It was a lovely, unearthly night, in which it would be especially hard to say hard things. Perhaps this girl felt it would be easy on this calm, serene night to yield to the words which seemed to vibrate in her pulses, and carry her, as on the breast of some smooth-flowing river, to the inward peace that would be in tune with the outward scene. The night seemed to speak of satisfaction and rest.

Yet it was only for a moment that she suffered her hands to lie in the grasp of the man who was pleading so earnestly. A dog's bark was heard in the distance, and at that moment a shadow crossed the window of the brightly-lighted cottage. The girl snatched her hands away, and sprang by her companion. Her determination seemed to receive a fresh spur as she now faced the cottage, and pealed quickly at the bell.

"It is no use—no use; what you wish never—never—never can be," she whispered vehemently, while her eyes flashed into the young man's. "Do you hear me?—never!" and with this most dismal of all words in human language on her lips, she passed up the garden, and, as the door opened, disappeared into the brightly-lighted hall.

II.

The Callows Farm was an old Elizabethan house which, from its commanding position on the crest of a gently rising down, known as Swallow's Hill, could be seen for miles around. Its original lines had evidently not been devoid of some architectural grace, but an ugly Georgian wing to the

right of the house, which had been added in the last century, gave the building an uncomfortable and lopsided appearance. The place had, besides, a grass-grown and mildewed look, a sort of vacant, forlorn air, such as you see in a dog who has lost his master. Yet it was not empty; save for the larger rooms of the Georgian wing, the house was occupied.

Mrs. Brock, the mistress of Callows Farm, indeed never left the grounds, having been confined to her room for many years by a spinal complaint which robbed her of all powers of walking.

She was an only child, and had inherited the place from old Callow, a shrewd, thrifty, if slightly parsimonious gentleman who died when she had attained her thirty-ninth year. It was some nine months after this respectable gentleman's decease that the mistress of Callows Farm married Mr. Brock, a dashing but impecunious man-about-town, whom she had met at some foreign spa. From this day forth things were changed at the Callows Farm. For a time all went merrily enough. The new master knew nothing of parsimony and loved good cheer, and pleased himself hugely in his new country home, riding to hounds in the winter, and playing with the management of the farm.

It may have been that his talents were not of the peace-making order. His temper, it is to be feared, was of the hot and slightly overbearing kind. It is indisputable that the overseer who had been on the Callows Farm for twenty years, left with a long tale of grievances, and that want of management made things go badly at Swallow's Hill.

The new country gentleman's ardour for the country turned out to be somewhat intermittent; there were months together in which he was not seen near Yarmouth, and in which, it was whispered by neighbours, he had gone back to his old haunts in town. True, Mr. Brock displayed himself in all his bravery at the hunt breakfasts, and in entertaining his friends at dinner. He liked to imply an expensive mode of living, and among other things to be called the "Squire," and be taken for a staunch Conservative. In reality it was not in Squire Brock's nature to be staunch about anything, even in matters which affected him more closely than political principles, but he perhaps took it to be part of a country gentleman's propaganda to talk of "blatant radicals" and "rascally agitators."

"I don't pretend to be a politician," Mr.

Brock was in the habit of saying to his neighbours. "I'm not a politician, but what do these low rascals want? They want the land," Mr. Brock would say grandiloquently over his lunch-table as he waved his white hand, on which he wore a large diamond. "They want my land, they want my house, they would like to turn me out of Callows Farm. That's what these miserable agitators want! What would become of us gentlemen, I should like to know, if we were to listen to them?"

At other times he would lead his guests round to the broad terrace which fronted the house, and say:

"That's my land as far as you can see—as far as you can see. As fine a tract of country as any in England. I think I may say that without boasting."

There was nothing either startling or new in Squire Brock's pretensions, but they seemed to have an irritating effect on his now grown-up son. Strange contradictions are frequently seen between parents and their offspring; in the case of Mr. Brock and his son nature seemed, so to speak, to have underlined their opposite-ness.

There had been great rejoicings and a good deal of pride on the part of the new squire when a little more than a quarter of a century back the mistress of Callows Farm had presented her husband with a son. In the face of the property being tied up on Mrs. Brock and her heirs, or, failing issue, to pass to old Mr. Callow's nephew, who had the happiness to possess five stalwart sons, it is hardly necessary to say that the small heir was made welcome. He was rocked in satin and lace, and had a brace of godfathers from town to give him a number of fine names, of which, however, he availed himself but sparsely, preferring in later life to sign himself "Ned" on all but formal occasions.

It was not until the following summer, when his father again betook himself to the distraction of town, that they discovered that poor Mrs. Brock was likely to be an invalid for life. There was a great deal of head-shaking, and a number of cures were tried. "There had been complications," said the great man, the physician called in by the country doctor; but in the end the great man and the "complications" left the mistress of Callows Farm on a sofa from which she never rose.

Before that time she had been a rather eager and emphatic woman, apt, perhaps, to persuade her neighbours to take her

particular tonic, and inclined to insist upon their going her particular short cut to heaven.

She was large-boned, and a trifle angular in shape, authoritative and chilling in manner, but with a sort of native dignity which sustained her under many trials.

She bore her confined and solitary life as only women can, and suffered without a murmur the many indignities of her husband as only women will. The squire's coldness, and her long helpless illness, did much to change the poor lady. It may have been that in the loneliness of the night the poor woman soothed her grief with tears, and, perhaps, with prayers, but to no living being did she ever discover the disappointment of her matured years.

To the neighbours who gathered round her sofa, with their inquisitive sympathy, and indiscreet condolences, Mrs. Brock had but one answer:

"My husband has gone to town to see my lawyer," or, "My husband has gone to do a little business; now I am such an invalid he has everything to do for me."

Her son as he grew up loved her, not passionately and extravagantly, as sons love injured mothers in plays and novels, but heartily and faithfully like the solid, undemonstrative Englishman he was, but even to him she did not tell the story of this quarter of a century of her life.

Perhaps she saw that the breach between father and son was likely to be wide enough without any intervention of hers, but it is probable that he guessed what she so carefully withheld from him. Even by the time the boy left school it was no secret to those about the farm that there was disagreement and ill-will, at any rate on the father's side, between these nearest of kinsmen. At the age of twenty the boy had a strongly marked individuality, the sort of individuality which was not likely to please his somewhat superficial and pushing father.

Instead of remaining at a university, to make, as Squire Brock said, "desirable acquaintances," Ned insisted on going to an agricultural college.

"He'll come back with all sorts of new-fangled notions, and probably think he knows better than his father," the squire would exclaim over the dessert, on the occasions when his wife was well enough to be carried down to dinner. "He'll want to make improvements, I'll be bound," the father would grumble on. "I know what that means—more out of our pockets."

In the meantime the squire, who considered himself a good judge of horse-flesh, kept a couple of hunters as well as a hack in his stables. He continued also to keep on his bachelor chambers in Ryder Street, because, as he often explained, he could not be expected to bury himself at Swallow's Hill. The expensive tastes, of which the squire had been so proud twenty years before, had now become part of his life.

Money troubles, and the constant drain on the invalid's purse in consequence, were making themselves felt in more ways than one. The poor old lady seemed broken, as if the fret and wear of her married life had destroyed her mental as well as her physical force. People, of course, wondered how anyone, who had been as sensible and practical as Miss Callow, could be now so foolishly weak with a good-for-nothing and spendthrift husband. She had always been credited with some of her father's thrift; how was it that she parted now with her last sixpence? What they ignored was that Mrs. Brock was just one of those wives whose affections bear the strain of hard usage.

It was thus that, when young Edward Brock returned to Callows Farm, he found a somewhat impoverished and dreary home. The place had become desolate and grass-grown since his childhood, the land had run to waste, the very farm-labourers had dwindled away.

Great things were expected, however, from the home-coming of the young squire. He was loved at once for his honest, open face, and the simple people round immediately thought that things would now, by some sort of magic, right themselves.

"Oh, ain't 'ee like th' old squire? 'Ee ain't a bit like 'is faather!" the villagers said, as they caught sight of his stalwart figure on the high-road. "I allows 'ee like th' old squire; but don't 'ee be in a fantigue," said the old housekeeper. And the old men, over their pipes and beer in the tap-room of the Royal George, told gallant tales of the grandfather who, in his day, they had probably thought a miserly, if tolerably just and lenient master.

It was in the second year after Ned Brock's home-coming that he began to notice a slim girl's figure passing in and out of the labourers' cottages at Swallow's Hill, or sometimes climbing the downs among the gorse in the fresh spring weather. At first he felt nothing more than the natural curiosity which every

young man feels at the sight of a graceful young woman.

By-and-by, as his business took him oftener into Yarmouth, the familiar figure on the downs seemed to become a part of the wayside picture, and he found himself looking for her coming, and missing her if she did not come. The road seemed dreary if he did not manage to catch sight of the slender girl's form gathering prim-roses in the high hedges, or passing with light tread by the little wicket-gate in the short cut across the churchyard.

It was a winsome, gracious apparition, Ned thought, and yet proud and maidenly, very different from the self-conscious young ladies he had seen in town.

Of course, when a young man has arrived at this precise state of mind, it is no difficult matter to get an introduction to the lady of his fancy, and having achieved this, it is the simplest thing in the world to fall in love with her.

So it came to pass that Ned Brock made up his mind to say the decisive word, and learn what manner of grace would be meted out to him.

About that time Squire Brock ran down for a few days to the Callows Farm, and young Ned very naturally took the opportunity of speaking of his intentions to his father.

It is possible Ned expected some strong opposition on the part of the squire; he was therefore surprised and somewhat taken off his guard when the latter gentleman received his news in a quiet, almost an acquiescent spirit.

"So, my dear boy, you are in love with Miss Merryweather?" said Squire Brock as they sat over their after-dinner wine one evening. "May I ask if the lady returns your affection?"

"I don't know—yet. I've not said anything," said the young fellow, flushing up.

"So much the better, so much the better," said the squire quickly, with something like a sigh of relief. He then filled his glass, and passed on to speak of other matters in connection with a disputed right of way from the glebe-land to an outlying farmhouse belonging to Swallow's Hill.

The next morning the squire came to Ned with an open letter in his hand.

"Here is more of this tiresome business," he said. "I shall be threatened with proceedings and dragged into a lawsuit next. My dear boy, you would do me a great favour if you could run up to town to-day

and have a look at the Quorn Farm papers. They are at the bank. You will be able to see at once what right we really have, and if there is any bother about it, take them to Higgins, our solicitor."

When, a few hours later, Ned Brock was steaming over the Solent, the squire had put on his hat and was strolling, cigar in mouth, down the road in the direction of Miss Merryweather's cottage.

Miss Merryweather was at home, and the squire, parting reluctantly with his havannah, was ushered into the small, prim drawing-room, and then the blind was raised at least ten inches, and a small chair was placed for his accommodation in the centre of the room, facing a newly-lit and chilly-looking fire.

The circumstances were certainly discouraging, and inasmuch as the squire knew little of Miss Merryweather, he was not a little beholden to chance for the successful issue of his visit.

On the appearance of the young lady, the squire put on his most bland and complimentary manner, keeping up a stream of small-talk on indifferent topics for some ten minutes. At last he said:

"You have seen a good deal of my son lately, Miss Merryweather?"

"Yes, I have seen him pretty frequently," the girl returned.

"Ah, a foolish boy—a foolish boy! gives us a great deal of trouble," said Squire Brock in self-commiserating tones.

"Indeed!" said Jane Merryweather coldly.

"Yes. You may think it strange, perhaps, that I should come to one so young as yourself to talk of private affairs, but it struck me that a young lady of your admirable bringing-up and strong character might have a great influence on my poor boy—a great influence."

"In what way, may I ask, Mr. Brock?" said the girl, who was now fairly astonished.

"Oh, in a hundred ways, my dear Miss Merryweather," went on the undaunted squire; "boys are so extremely foolish, so extremely injudicious, they have no regard for the fitness of things."

"Have you any reason for thinking your son injudicious at the present time?" asked Jane slowly, in an icy undertone.

"Indeed we have," said Mr. Brock, now boldly showing his hand. "My dear Miss Merryweather, the poor boy is always falling in love; of course it is a mere folly, he will have forgotten all about it by the end of the month, no doubt, but in the

meantime boys entangle themselves so easily, and there are many things to be considered—questions of means and family, you understand, with his name and position."

"I should have thought that no lady would be anxious to push herself into a family where she was unwelcome," said the girl.

"You think so?" cried the delighted squire. "Ah, no doubt any delicately minded woman would feel as you do. Your sentiments do you infinite credit, Miss Merryweather. You see, with my boy's position, with his property, in fact, there are important reasons which prevent his marrying the first agreeable girl he sees. And yet if he knew I had spoken in the matter—he is such an obstinate fellow—you understand me, I am sure, Miss Merryweather?"

"I think I understand you, Mr. Brock," said the girl with some dignity, as she rose and stood facing him with folded hands, "and I should say that you might set your mind at rest concerning the young lady with whom you say your son is in love. I should say, as you have asked my advice, that rather than force herself on a family, she would prefer never to speak to your son again;" and opening the door she bowed to the squire, saying, "I presume that, if she knew your feeling in the matter, that is what she would say."

The squire was compelled to rise. He had not intended the affair to take so uncomfortable a turn, and having looked upon petticoated humanity as easily flattered and managed, had had it in his mind to end his visit with some compliment or joke. Neither pleasantry came to his mind, however, as he rose before the stern gesture of this pale young woman. Muttering something about "knowing he could depend on her fine insight," the squire bowed himself out of the room.

On gaining the road he was conscious that it was a shabby retreat. The victory indeed was his, and yet it is possible he felt more humiliation than if it had been a defeat.

III.

"Aunt Maria," called out Jane Merryweather on the morning following the episode recorded in our first chapter.

"My love," answered a thin but cheery voice from the upper regions of the dapper little cottage.

"Aren't you coming down to lunch, aunt?" called out the girl again.

"I'm coming, my dear, this instant,"

returned the elder lady, who as a rule disappeared finally into some top cupboard or back cellar after making this encouraging statement.

On the present occasion she actually appeared in the miniature dining-room some twelve minutes later, and the two ladies, that is to say one of them, proceeded to eat lunch, which was set on a small table overlooking the garden.

"My dear child, why don't you eat?" said Aunt Maria after some ten minutes, in which Miss Merryweather had done little but play with her knife and fork.

"I don't feel hungry to-day, aunt," said the girl, who now got up and pushed away her chair.

Presently she began pacing up and down the room.

"Do you know, aunt, I believe it is warm enough to open the window," said the girl. "Aunt, should you catch cold if I were to open it?" went on Miss Merryweather, as she threw open the casement. "How delicious the air is!" she said rather dreamily as she stepped outside.

The small garden was gay with primroses and crocuses, and filled with the hum of insects and the indescribable but easily perceptible movement of spring. Everything quivered with life. How prim, and tidy, and orderly it looked, the little garden which she knew so well! There was the rose-tree she had planted two summers ago, with the delicate young leaves just bursting from their buds. Beyond stood a great bunch of golden daffodils in the bright, pale sunshine. That was all her eye seemed to focus as she stood bare-headed against the little grass-plot and the faint blue sky. Just outside the garden somewhere a skylark was singing. Every now and then a bird flew past the girl's motionless figure, and a faint cock-crow from some distant garden sounded through the air. A vague restlessness seemed to stir in her veins as the dizzy dancing sunlight and the hundred balmy odours of spring-time played around her. A feeling of isolation took possession of her in this scene of busy, opening life.

"Aunt Maria, I feel as if I should like to walk twenty miles. Do you ever feel like that?" said Miss Merryweather rather abruptly, as she returned to the open window where her aunt was still quietly eating her lunch.

"My dear, the air is very fresh; would you have the kindness to come in and shut the window?" returned the elder lady.

The young girl obeyed rather listlessly, and then threw herself into an easy-chair by the little fireplace.

"My dear aunt, don't you ever get tired of eating your lunch at just the same time of day, and going to bed at just the same time of night?" asked the girl rather irritably after a few minutes' pause, in which the placid lady at the lunch-table had gone on steadily eating.

"My dear child, what an odd idea!" exclaimed the lady.

"Fancy eating every day of one's life at one o'clock for fifty years," went on the girl; "isn't the idea enough to take away your appetite? The monotony of it is enough to make one go mad. It's a wonder so many people make up their minds to go through the labour of living so many years——"

"My dear child, I wish you would behave like an ordinary human being with a head set on its shoulders, instead of tempting Providence by talking such nonsense," broke in Aunt Maria.

"My dear Aunt Maria, I think I have frequently pointed out to you that you are wholly deficient in imagination. If you had even the slightest perception of the beautiful, for instance——"

"All I can say is, Jane, that if you don't take it into your head to eat like a Christian before to-morrow, I shall send for the doctor," said Aunt Maria decisively.

"Ah, suppose we see the doctor," said the girl with a smile; "I shall tell the doctor that the spring weather is seriously affecting my health, and that I want change of air, and he will immediately prescribe change of air; and then——and then——Aunt, wouldn't you like to go to Dresden, or perhaps to Rome?"

"What has come to the girl?" ejaculated Aunt Maria. "Just now it was a walk of twenty miles, now it's Dresden, if you please. What place in the four quarters of the globe will you pitch on next, for goodness sake?"

"Oh, there are lots of places. There's Normandy, for instance. No, that would be too cold just yet; but there's Naples or Sicily, you know. Rome would be delightful for Easter. Aunt, I know you would like to kiss the Pope's toe, it's no use saying you wouldn't."

"I've never seen anything like your restlessness for the last three or four days, Jane," expostulated Aunt Maria. "You are never still for an instant. I'm sure I've heard you say dozens of times that you

wouldn't be happy away from Swallow's Hill. You couldn't bear the notion of going to India. Of course, if you were really ill, and had to go away, it would be another thing. Then there's the house; if I did want to go away, how could we leave it?"

"Oh, let it," cried the girl airily. "But in the meantime I really will go for a walk, and consider whether Rome or Naples would be the nicer;" and then, kissing her aunt, Miss Merryweather ran upstairs for her hat and jacket, and soon disappeared for the rest of the afternoon.

Jane Merryweather was the daughter of an English officer stationed in India, the eldest of some five or six children who had been sent home for their education. She had now left her "finishing school" some two years, being nearly twenty-one years of age, but had not, as had first been intended, returned to her parents across the seas. The fact was that Janey had been in the habit of spending her vacation with her Aunt Maria, Miss McLachlan, and that good lady had become so fond of her niece that she had prayed for the loan of her companionship for another year before she returned to India. The year had spread itself into two when there began to be a talk of Colonel and Mrs. Merryweather returning to England. The latest arrangement had been that Mrs. Merryweather should come back in the following summer, and be accompanied, if possible, by her husband. So Janey stayed on with Miss McLachlan, much to her own and to that lady's satisfaction.

Her restlessness dated only from the day on which Squire Brock had done her the honour to call at the cottage, and it increased rather than diminished as the next few days went by.

Miss Merryweather was young, and was perhaps learning for the first time the wide difference which distinguishes a piece of impulsive self-denial from the unexciting, everyday, inch-by-inch endurance of a like piece of renunciation.

And yet, dreary as the experience was, she did nothing to alter her decision.

It was only after a rather sleepless night that she began to think that her promise to the squire would be easier to keep if she were out of the reach of his son's appeals. "How would it be," she asked herself, "if her love should, in some weak moment, prove stronger than her pride?" She feared, lest in listening to the son, she might forget the squire's galling words, and

be tempted to present herself at the doors of this inhospitable family, only to be slighted. Jane Merryweather knew nothing of the disposition of the Swallow's Hill property, and had she been in full possession of all the facts, it is only fair to say that it would have made no difference in her conduct; indeed, it would have only made her firmer in her decision to have nothing to do with fascinating or entrapping anyone so "injudicious" as the squire had called the young heir.

She had mentioned going abroad to her aunt that day more in joke than anything else, but as she wandered over the downs the idea began to fix itself in her mind. She felt confined and cramped in this small place, with its narrow, placid existence, its little round of pleasures, and, above all, with this intolerable self-imposed duty of being hard to the man she loved.

Somewhere—anywhere away it would be easier to bear, she felt. Go where she would his words seemed to be ringing in her ears, and walk as far as she might, at some point of the road, she would be sure to see the gables of Callows Farm, his home, to bring back this strange new pain. Only the day before she had told him that it would be a grief to her to go away from Swallow's Hill, now it struck her that it would be far more intolerable to stay.

In great mental distress we shift our minds as in a physical one we do our bodies, both in a perfectly natural effort to rid ourselves of what seems unbearable pain. So through the long afternoon of the lengthening March day, one weary fancy chased another through her brain, as looking from headland to headland she set herself the task of walking to the farthest point she could see. Below her lay the sea savagely lashing the rocky shore with its fringe of surf, while above her the great clouds moved in solemn procession, until they were lost in one another in the vast horizon.

Here at least she could breathe, she no longer felt the unendurable confinement of the narrow cottage walls, the ticking of the hall-clock, or the regularity of the meals which she could no longer eat. Yet how wide and cheerless those rugged, wind-blown downs appeared! There was no earnest in them of any joy to come. Here was neither the promise of spring nor summer, but the look of hard endurance which even the changing seasons would not change.

She sat down at last to rest, and began plucking the little golden sea-thistles which nestle in the coarse brown grass. Far off, on the narrow path skirting the cliff by which she had come, she could now discern a solitary man's figure coming in her direction. Her heart began to beat with excitement as the fear took hold of her that perhaps the figure might be that of her lover; but when, after some quarter of an hour, it turned out to be a stranger, she experienced one of those natural but inconsistent pangs of disappointment which the cessation of any excitement, whether pleasant or otherwise, invariably brings.

That evening, as Jane Merryweather sat in a low chair opposite her aunt in the small drawing-room, on the same large white mat, before the same fire with its needlework fire-board, impossible lustre candlesticks, she again experienced the strange, unreal feeling of the morning. It was as if she were some stranger, regarding her familiar surroundings. Had they not sat just so, her aunt with her feet slightly raised on a stool, and a small table with lights by her side, as she embroidered the same piece of elaborate altar-cloth, while she discoursed affably of any exciting horror she had culled from the penny papers? This they had done every evening for the space of two years, without finding the time either tiresome or monotonous. Yet, tired as she was, Jane Merryweather felt restless in her chair, and told herself that such evenings were no longer possible. The very click of Miss McLachlan's needle was irritating.

"Squire Brock has gone up to town again, I hear," began Aunt Maria composedly, as she cleared her voice for a long "cosy" chat with her niece.

"Yes—has he?" said Jane Merryweather vaguely, looking into the fire. She had now no possible interest in the squire's movements, and would have preferred not to have had the name of Brock mentioned in her hearing again.

But, as through a combination of pride and shyness she had mentioned nothing of the interview with the squire, and her aunt in consequence knew nothing of what had occurred, she could give no possible reason for avoiding the subject of such legitimate gossip.

"Poor old Mrs. Brock seems very ill," went on Miss McLachlan; "very ill. I shouldn't be surprised to hear of—anything happening to her any day," she went on, drawing a long thread of silk through her

work and regarding her stitch critically. "By-the-bye, I heard that Mr. Edward is to go away—going to America, the dear vicar said. I should say that if he does go he would never see his poor old mother alive again."

"Going away?" said Jane quickly. "Who said— Did the vicar say he was going away?"

Miss McLachlan had risen to ring the bell to give some final order to the servant, and now turned round to her niece as she re-seated herself.

"My dear child, how pale you look! I really cannot have you taking these long walks; they cannot be good for any girl. You must go to bed early to-night," said Miss McLachlan, looking over her spectacles at her niece, who was sitting quite erect in her chair, with her hand pressing tightly the arm of that piece of furniture.

"Oh, I'm all right, auntie," she replied. "You were saying something about young Mr. Brock going away to America, weren't you?" she asked with a manifest effort to keep to her usual manner.

"That is what several people told me in the village; I can't vouch for it," returned Aunt Maria. "Now I think of it, it's very odd he hasn't called to tell us about it; for my part, considering how much we've seen of him, I think it's very odd. But young men are queer, my dear—very queer."

After waiting for some sort of remark or acquiescence from Jane, Miss McLachlan repeated:

"Don't you think it's very queer he's not called to tell us?"

"Odd? Oh, I don't know;" and rising, and turning her back to her aunt, she stood with her two hands on the mantel-board as she gazed into the fire. Presently she heard Miss McLachlan murmur:

"Well, well, it's no business of mine," and then the monotonous click of the indefatigable needle began again.

"I think I really will go to bed; it is a good idea of yours, auntie," said the girl after a minute, and kissing her aunt forthwith, she escaped from the room to the silence and freedom of her own chamber.

IV.

Jane Merryweather did not go to bed when she reached her room, but blew out her candle, and pulling up the blinds, sat looking out of her window over the shadowy landscape. The moon was shining, and she could just distinguish

one end of the Callows Farm looking out of the distant mass of trees. It was a pale, chilly night, in which field and world shone with a thin layer of hoar-frost, while the wind, moving swift and high, drove a bank of dappled clouds in streaks across the sky. Now and then voices were heard on the road beneath the window, and at intervals the distant sound of a dog's howl. Presently she heard the bolting of doors, and then the two servants, and afterwards her aunt, came upstairs, and soon all was quiet for the night. Just after the big hall-clock struck ten, and Jane Merryweather, tired out with her long walk, began to undress and go to bed.

She had no idea how long she had been asleep, when she suddenly opened her eyes. The room was quite quiet, but the moonlight lay in bright streaks across her bed. She had forgotten to pull down the blind, and for some time lay watching the bright clouds as they scudded across the sky. Every minute she seemed to get more wide awake, and, as sleep at last appeared impossible, she threw a shawl round her shoulders and began to pace up and down the room. The moon had considerably altered its position since she had gone to bed, so that, although she heard no clock strike, she judged it to be about one o'clock in the morning.

How beautiful the moon was! It shone on the white road which led to Swallow's Hill, on the roof of the old house, so that it could be seen nearly as clearly as in the ordinary light of day. Her head felt very hot, so that she leant it against the cold pane of glass as she watched the old house in the distance, of which she had become so fond. All at once it seemed to her that a dense cloud of smoke poured from one of the chimney-stacks of the Callows Farm, and in less than a minute after she saw a bright flame leap out of the volume of smoke. The flame increased, as she strained her eyes to watch, and soon the whole stack was enveloped in dense smoke and flame. It was on fire! Instinctively, and without a moment's reflection, she turned from the window, struck a light, and began putting on her clothes.

The Callows Farm was on fire—what was the best thing to be done? It would be useless to wake her aunt, who would be frightened out of her life; to whom should she go? Jane Merryweather was dressed by this time, and slipping quietly downstairs, unbolted the door, and in another minute was running down the road.

Tom Jones, the coach-driver, lived at the corner of the street, so throwing a stone at his window, she called out the bad news, bidding him follow as quickly as possible, then hurried on the ascending road to Swallow's Hill.

How the thoughts surged through her brain as she tore along! The fire was not in the quarter of the house in which either Mrs. Brock or her son slept, but the place was almost entirely built of wood—oak, old and well-seasoned, in which the fire would spread with terrible rapidity. The wind was springing up too. Was it in the direction of the sleeping-rooms? If the fire caught the roof? Would they be awake? Would they have had the alarm? How should she get at them? These, and a hundred other questions, tore at her heart as she hurried on breathlessly, with only the sound of her own footsteps and heavy breathing on the lonely road. Every now and again she caught sight of the burning house, between the dark masses of trees, then it was lost in an undulation of the road, and she could only see the awful glare of red in the sky to mark the whereabouts of the Callows Farm. She had entered the wood by this time, and the wind stirring in the arms of the skeleton trees creaked and groaned in an uncanny way as the fitful moonlight and the tree-shadows flecked her uneven path. How long the way seemed! Should she never reach the farm? The wind was blowing in her face, and already smoke and soot and small sparks of fire were visible overhead. The next minute she was conscious of footsteps behind her. She could distinctly hear the panting breath of running men. Thank Heaven! there was some help at hand then, and Jane Merryweather, turning her head, saw two coast-guardsmen from Freshwater Gate making with all speed for the farm. One of the men she knew. She had often had long talks with him on the downs about the seagulls' nests and the ship adventures of the coast.

"If there is no one stirring, break open a window or door!" she screamed, as the two men passed her in full swing. "I know where the sleeping-rooms are and the best flight of stairs to take."

It was impossible to keep up with them. In another minute they had disappeared in the darkness of the wood, and Jane could only hear the sound of their quickly-falling foot-treads.

In three minutes more, however, she had

gained a side-gate of the farmyard leading to the cow-sheds, and climbing the gate in the shower of soot and sparks, she gained the back wing of the house as the coast-guardsmen with their united efforts crashed in a small side-door.

"Follow me," cried the girl. "This door leads into a side-passage to the kitchen, I think, and we can then get into the other wing of the house," cried Jane Merryweather breathlessly, as she darted on in front of the men and groped her way along the dark passage.

One man growled and told her not to go on, but to leave it to them; but by this time Jane, feeling her way along by the walls, had traversed the kitchen, and had gained the passage which led to the living-rooms, where she was met by a dense cloud of smoke. For a moment she felt stifled and dizzy, but as she heard the two men groping behind her, she gained courage, and pressed on to the right, where a turn in the passage brought them to the foot of the stairs leading to the upper floor.

"This way!" she cried, and darting up the stairs, with her hand firmly claspings the banister, she again encountered a still thicker wall of smoke.

She noticed that it seemed to be coming from the right wing, so that the room which lay to the left, which Mrs. Brock occupied, might still be untouched by the devouring flames. At the same time it became hotter every moment.

Jane managed to creep to this upper landing, where she could distinctly hear screams, which seemed to proceed from this latter side.

At that moment she stumbled against something, and heard Ned Brock's voice exclaiming to an apparently terrified servant:

"There is the staircase now; you are not hurt; you can get out by the front door. Run as hard as you can to Golden Hill Fort for the engine. As hard as you can—do you hear?"

"Ned—Ned!" cried Jane Merryweather. "Is that you? Are you hurt?" she exclaimed, as she clung to him as if she could never let him go again.

"Good Heavens, Jane!" he answered, "how are you here?"

"Where is your mother?" she went on, as he quickly guided her downstairs out of danger of the fire.

"Thank Heaven she is outside in the garden. I've just carried her down, but she'll be killed out there in the cold. I must run back for a mattress and shawls."

They had reached the ground-floor by this time, and as he indicated the way out, and turned to go back, a tremendous crash echoed through the house, and a great flame lit up the down-pouring smoke at the head of the passage. The floor had fallen in. Jane nearly tumbled to the ground with the force of the shock, but managed to stagger towards her lover, who clasped her tightly in his arms. They were nearly choked with the suffocating and blinding smoke. The heat was frightful, as the flames now lapped along the ceiling. Blindly and desperately he struggled along the passage, while she whispered :

"You must not go back—you shall not. My—my darling, I love you—I have loved you all the time!"

The next instant she had lost consciousness, and it was the weight of a lifeless figure that he dragged out into the open air.

Some days after, Jane Merryweather was sitting in Miss McLachlan's prim little drawing-room. She was half-lounging, half-reclining in a large armchair, and had a book on her lap and a bunch of primroses in a vase on a table at her side. She wore a knitted blue shawl over her shoulders, and had the languid air of a person who is being petted and made much of.

It is possible that Miss Merryweather had succumbed to her aunt's entreaties and had allowed herself the dissipation of being ill. At any rate Miss McLachlan had been in her glory for a whole week, making mysterious brews, and running about with a bottle of port wine under her arm, a glass of which fluid she was continually offering her niece. There was nothing which roused Miss McLachlan's enthusiasm like having some one to nurse.

"Ah, my love!" she exclaimed, coming into the dining-room, "how are you now? Surely the light will hurt your eyes; let me lower the blind just a little!"

Aunt Maria fussed about the room with twenty suggestions for her niece's comfort, which, of course, had the effect of making her uncomfortable.

"My dear aunt, I am perfectly well, only I feel frightfully lazy," returned the girl. "Won't you get your work and sit down?"

"My dear, I've not had the altar-piece out for a whole week. You frightened me to death, my dear, when you were brought home that night. I wonder you weren't killed. I don't wonder it was too much for

poor old Mrs. Brock. Well, poor dear! she's at peace now," said Aunt Maria.

Jane had already heard that the mistress of Callows Farm had succumbed to the shock she had received the night of the fire.

"She was a kind old lady. When was she buried, aunt?" she asked as she looked out dreamily on to the bright sunshine through the window.

"The day before yesterday, my love," returned Miss Merryweather. "By-the-bye, Mr. Edward was here again this morning, Jane; he wants to see you, but of course I told him it would be most unadvisable. I told him that you must be kept quite quiet. He looked worried, I could not help noticing, but I told him that you had asked to have his flowers, which he's brought every day, always beside the bed."

"You didn't, aunt," expostulated Jane, blushing furiously; "how could you?"

"Bless my life, why not?" asked Miss McLachlan, who by this time had evidently guessed a part of the little romance which was going on, and brought more than even the usual feminine zest for such things to bear on the occasion. "And why shouldn't you take Mr. Edward Brock's flowers?" asked Aunt Maria again, who, like other ladies, could argue on any side when thwarted.

"Oh, I don't know," said Jane vaguely, while the bright blushes still played on her cheeks. "I don't think you ought to tell a man that sort of thing."

"Well, all I can say is, I hope you'll be polite to the poor young man when he calls, Jane," said Miss McLachlan. "He has been most thoughtful in coming to ask after you, considering what he's had to do; with all the terrible trouble he's gone through, I don't know how he can have made the time."

Perhaps Jane Merryweather did not wonder at this so much as her worthy aunt, but she said nothing. Dropping her head back into her cushions she closed her eyes, and luxuriously suffered her thoughts to travel back to the short space of a week ago, when everything had been so different.

How strange everything had been on that terrible night! For a few days it had seemed like some dream, a thing so improbable as to be difficult to realise. The poor old lady was dead. And the son? She felt in a way ashamed and humiliated, after all her good resolutions to have succumbed in the manner she had done;

and yet she knew that those few minutes in which she had been clasped in her lover's arms, were minutes which would probably alter her whole life. Could she retract those words? She must tell him to forget them even if she herself were powerless to do so. That was her duty. She must say that she was frightened—mad—no matter what lie to keep to the implied promise she had given his father in that same small drawing-room in which she was sitting, less than a fortnight since.

That was the dreary vista down which duty beckoned her. And all the long afterwards? It wouldn't bear thinking of.

Her eyes travelled to the window, and then rising she threw it open, leaning her hand against the upright sash. A hazy sunshine was shining on the budding undergrowth, and an almond-tree, ablaze with blossom, blushed against the misty copse of birch and oak. A bird's wing, as it flashed past her, caught the pale golden glow, while again the delicious trembling note of a skylark reached her from some unseen place.

It was the season of hope, but it would seem that this girl, gazing out on to the awakening world, experienced little of that agreeable sensation.

At that moment she was conscious of an opening door, and turning, pale and sad in the glimmer of the afternoon sunshine, she felt her hands seized, and covered with warm passionate kisses. It was her lover.

Now was the moment for the calm, collected word, the explanation.

"My darling, why have you refused to see me? Were you really ill?" and a torrent of endearing phrases poured upon the trembling girl, until in another minute she found herself in his arms.

Half an hour after, Jane Merryweather, drawing herself away, advanced again to the window to look once more upon the placid outer scene.

Nothing was changed. But Nature was harmonious now, for the promise of life, the inner spring-time, was stirring in her heart.

HETTY'S DOWRY.

I.

"You don't think I have been hard upon you, Hetty? You feel sure that if it were not a matter of duty—of conscience, indeed—I should not ask it of you. You

don't suppose your poor old father would willingly give you pain—eh, child?"

The vicar's voice was quivering with emotion, and any passing resentment there may have been in his daughter's heart died out of it as she listened.

"No, no, papa," she murmured, stooping and kissing him; but she could not trust herself to say more, and so hurried from his presence to the sanctuary of her own room, there to fight out the hard battle with self as best she might.

The Rev. George Carmichael had not, on the whole, made a bad thing of his life. Well born and bred, and gifted with unusual abilities, he was not only the incumbent of a pretty and prosperous little parish, but had made himself a name as a popular and successful coach. At one time the ivy-clad, idyllic-looking vicarage had housed as many as half-a-dozen scions of the British aristocracy; but that was in the old days, when Mrs. Carmichael was living, and Hetty, the vicar's one daughter, was away at school.

For the last few years, the number had been limited to four. His own two sons in the army were doubtless somewhat of a drag upon the good man's resources; but it was not the want of money which imparted its present harassed expression to his mild face. He could not bear to see suffering. What must it have been to him, then, to inflict it?

And he had inflicted it just now upon his own "little girl!"

"She has left it behind her," he said, taking up a letter, which was lying open on the table near him, and re-perusing it, for the fifth or sixth time, half-mechanically.

There was one passage in it, at which he paused, with a faint flush on his pale face.

"I am sure," it ran, "from my personal knowledge of you in the dear old days at Frampton, that you will not misunderstand me, but will believe that, had there been the means to justify it on either side, I should not have opposed myself for one moment to an engagement between my son and your daughter; but, in poor Cyril's position, with a title to keep up on a miserable pittance of four hundred pounds a year, you will see for yourself that to consent to his marriage with anyone, unable to add to his income, would be to consign both to misery and poverty. Forgive me for writing—as I feel—strongly."

"It is common-sense," the vicar muttered half aloud; "but she might have

spared herself the trouble. My girl is as precious to me as her boy to her; but I blame myself for not seeing what it was coming to. Now, if it had been Chris, I should not have been surprised. Well, she is a good girl," he added with a sigh. "I can write and put my lady's mind at rest, anyhow. She need have no fear of any daughter of mine forcing herself where she is not wanted."

So he pulled his desk towards him and began a rough draft of a letter, which was to match the Marchioness's own. And in the meantime, upstairs, there was a passionate shedding of tears and a repetition of that fierce struggle between love and pride, of which so many hundreds and thousands of women have tasted the bitterness, ere now.

"I should never have allowed him to speak to me! Oh, why did I—why did I? He knew he had no right—he might have been sure his mother would never consent! And yet, oh, Cyril, Cyril! what shall I do without you?"

That was the burden of it all: what was she to do without him? It had been harder than anybody could tell to say "Good-bye" to him; but, then, everybody had been so sorry to see him go, it had seemed only natural she, too, should care more than usual. He had been such a favourite from the first; nobody else, except Chris Fortescue, had ever made himself so beloved at the vicarage; and then, in manner and appearance, in all that charms the eye, he had such an advantage over Chris. Dear old Chris! whom even Aunt Lavinia—one of those excellent, but aggravating women whose hard manners, from first to last on their way through life, belie their soft hearts—had learned to love, though there had been a time when she was very wrath with what she was pleased to call the romantic folly of her brother and his wife in keeping and christening as their own, a boy who had no claim upon them, and apparently not a friend in the world. It had been all very well, so long as he was not only the most loveable but the most remunerative of the Indian children, with whom the Carmichaels had been thankful, in the early years of their married life, to share their home and eke out their income; but when, with the sudden death of the child's father, the payments ceased altogether, and there was nobody forthcoming to provide for his maintenance either at Alderton or elsewhere, there was

no call, so far as the vicar's sister could see, for the good man to put himself in the breach.

He had done it, however, without hesitation, and he had never regretted it. The boy, like his own sons, was out in the world now, and was doing well, and they saw more of him at home than of either of the others, for, whereas they were quartered now here, now there, Chris, who had aspired to nothing grander than a stool in an office, was always at the great centre. He was in Miss Lavinia's mind at the very moment when Hetty, crying upstairs, was mentally comparing him with her handsome young lover.

"As soon as I know the day," the good lady was saying to herself, as she stamped and sealed a letter addressed to Mrs. Featherstone, The Hollies, West Kensington, "I shall drop him a line and ask him to meet her. Mary can't in common decency refuse to have her, whether the girls think she will be in the way or not, and she need not interfere with their invitations and amusements. Besides, she will want change after this little affair of the heart," and Miss Lavinia made a little satirical grimace, "and I mean her to have it. I can't have her moping about the house like a sick cat, and making poor dear George as melancholy as herself. I know what girls are when they get into that way, and defend me from them!"

Let it be observed and put to her credit, however, that whilst she talked like this, even to herself, she was doing what she honestly believed to be the kindest thing by Hetty, and doing it without loss of time or waste of words.

The little letter that was in progress upstairs, though there was not much of it, took a long time to write, and when it was written, Lady Fenshire herself could have found no fault in it. It was useless his coming to speak to papa, she said—his mother's letter to her father had arrived by the same post as his own to her, and, anyhow, whether it had so happened or not, she would have had to make the same answer. She should never, never forget that he had so loved her as to make him contemplate their marriage; but he would see, when he came to think, that his mother was quite right for both their sakes, and that it could never be. And she hoped he would forgive her for all the trouble she had caused him, and that his life would be a very happy one, and, finally, though she might never see him again, she should

never cease to love him and to pray for him. A pretty, sad little letter, which mirrored the heart of the writer—a heart so heavy that no wonder when Miss Lavinia came up, as the afternoon wore on, with a cup of tea for the “silly child,” she uttered an exclamation of dismay at the sight of her face.

“Good gracious, child! What a fright you have made of yourself! And there is Chris Fortescue just come and dying to see you. His people gave him a holiday, on account of some procession or something of that sort in the City, and he left the show to go on without him, and ran down here. You must bathe your face and make yourself presentable—you must indeed, Hetty.”

The poor little face required a good deal of bathing, however, before it was in any degree fit to be seen, and the pale cheeks and swollen eyes would have told their own tale to the visitor, even had his hostess not prepared him.

As far as Hetty could be glad of anything at that particular juncture, she was glad to have Chris to talk to. He was like a brother to her, with a difference—the difference being that he was ever so many times more patient and sympathetic than either of the boys had ever been.

So she told him all about it out in the garden after dinner, in the calm of the beautiful June evening, with the scent of the roses heavy on the air, and with a sky above them cloudless in its serenity. At such an hour, and with such surroundings, it would have been bliss enough to the simple, ingenuous nature of the young man to feel life, with all its pristine power of enjoyment, stirring within him; but the beauty and the fragrance seemed to die out of the landscape and be as much lost to him as they were to Hetty, as he listened to her.

Had he known anything about it? Had Cyril said anything to him? They had always been such friends, she had thought perhaps he might. It had seemed to her everybody must see months ago, but papa had not, nor yet Aunt Lavinia, and of course it might have been the same with him, only she fancied—

“What did you fancy, Hetty?” he asked quietly. They were pacing slowly side by side down a garden path at the back of the house, just far enough from it, and just sheltered enough by the intervening shrubs, to protect them from remark or observation on the part of the other

members of the household, and nobody saw, any more than Hetty herself, the eager, hungry look that was in his big, brown eyes, as his lips framed the question. “What did you fancy?” he said once more, as she did not reply.

“I don’t know, Chris; it seems conceited to say it, but I thought if anybody would notice any—well, any change in me, it would be you.”

The eager look died out of his eyes, but a faint flush came up into his cheeks as she thus answered him. But her eyes were not for him, and she marked neither.

“And you thought right,” he said. “Besides, Beaumont told me himself he was awfully fond of you. I guessed what it must come to sooner or later.”

“You guessed that it would end like this? Is that what you mean?”

“No, dear, I did not mean that. I felt pretty sure he would put it to the touch—that is what I meant.”

“And you thought it would be all right? You did not remember any more than he did all the difficulties there were in the way of it?” pleaded the girl. She had an uneasy consciousness, truth to tell, that these were things which a man ought to remember, before he speaks. She was longing for the assurance of Chris’s forgetfulness to excuse Cyril’s.

“To tell you the truth, Hetty, I tried not to think of it at all,” Chris said.

“But why? I don’t understand.”

“No, dear, you don’t understand. I did not want to think of you in any other way than I had always been accustomed to think of you. I did not want you converted into a fine lady and living away from everybody—goodness knows where. I liked to think of you here, your old self, always in your old place. It was selfish, I suppose, but I could not help it.”

“You would have had me live here for ever, whether I was happy or not! You never thought of my happiness. Oh, Chris, what has come to you? Instead of wishing me joy, this is what you wished me! And you have got your wish! Oh yes, indeed you have! There is no fear of my ever being a fine lady, and having a home of my own, and distressing you in that way now,” cried the poor child distractedly.

“You don’t understand,” Chris said sadly. “And how was I to tell that you were not happy as you were? I thought we were very happy—all of us; and as for my not wishing you joy, was there ever any-

thing in the world I would not have done for you, Hetty?"

She had turned away from him, and was standing with her head bent, her slight frame shaken with sobs.

"I can't help it," she got forth at last; "I am very foolish, I know, but I am so miserable. I don't know what is to become of me, and I did think when I told you, you would be sorry. If anybody you cared for had been taken away from you for ever, there is nothing I would not have done for you—nothing!"

"But, Hetty, when there is nothing one can do," pleaded poor Chris. "I wish I were a rich man, dear, for your sake."

"If you knew how I hate money!" sobbed out Hetty. "I shall hate it all my life."

"If only I had it at this moment, I would make you love it," he replied gravely.

They heard Miss Lavinia's voice in the distance, calling them in to tea, and crossing the lawn, went into the house in silence; but, once within, the girl made her escape to her own room, and her companion joined the little party in the drawing-room alone.

"Have you told Hetty of your rise in life?" the vicar asked with a smile, as he made room for him. "I only wish promotion were as rapid in the army as it seems to be with some of you in the City."

Chris smiled too as he answered, but in the smile there was no light of triumph or gratification.

"There is a great deal in luck, sir, and I have been very lucky," he said. "Besides, it is time I began to make head against the stream; I have been in the office now hard upon six years."

"You don't mean it, Chris! How the time flies, to be sure!"

"It does not seem like it, certainly," Chris assented, "though it has been pretty close work too. I had not had a fortnight's clear leave out of the year, when I came down here last autumn to be nursed."

"That was a sharp attack you had that time, my boy. A face like a hatchet, hadn't he, Lavinia? and a growth of hair that would have done credit to a chimpanzee. I shall never forget Beaumont's face, when he first set eyes on you. I never fairly comprehended the term 'blank astonishment' before. You had been described to him as such a *rara avis* in every way—he felt, I suspect, something of the disappointment of the country

bumpkin who could not comprehend the Queen without her crown."

"He could not expect a man, fresh risen from a bed of sickness, to turn out as great a dandy as himself," Miss Lavinia observed, not without contempt. "He is a good-looking young fellow, but he is a vast deal too alive to the fact."

"He is a very good fellow," Chris said quietly. "There is the right stuff under the veneer, no matter how thick it is put on."

"Perhaps so," the lady assented shortly; "it is not always the best wood that takes the brightest polish." And then the conversation drifted into wider channels, and became general.

II.

Lord Cyril Beaumont did not feel at all disposed to accept his fate, as it was presented to him in Hetty's letter. How he was to run in the teeth of his mother's wishes he did not quite see, nor yet, when he came, as the girl suggested, to think of it—how he was to keep a wife on three to four hundred a year. But to counter-balance these difficulties there was another—the absolute impossibility of living without Hetty. And here it may be remarked that Hetty Carmichael was just the sort of little girl for whose sake from time immemorial any amount of foolish things have been done by men who ought to have known better. It was not so much that she was pretty, as that she had certain pretty, clinging, affectionate ways, a sweet temper, and the air of loving and believing implicitly, as a child might do, in any one she attached herself to. There is nothing harder to do without, when once one has become habituated to the reception of it, than this simple, spontaneous sort of homage, and young Lord Cyril found his life so spoilt by even the temporary absence of it, that to make up his mind to it for a permanency was out of the question. He would throw up his commission and go out to the Colonies, and see what could be done there, sooner! Give her up he would not, and he wrote and told her so flatly. Whereupon the vicar wrote him a letter, which he, Cyril, characterised as a "stinger," and which took him down on wings of love and indignation to the vicarage, where, however, he failed to find Hetty, and had things put very plainly and decidedly before him by her father.

"I shall never give up the hope of her,

“sir. You can't make me, and I shall move heaven and earth to get her,” cried the young man.

“She will never have my permission until you have your mother's, and she will never disobey me,” was the quiet reply. “She would not even read your letters, were I to forbid it; but I would beg of you to spare me such a necessity. You tell me yourself you cannot at present see your way. Wait, at all events, until you think you see it, before you say anything more to her.”

This was temporising with the difficulty, and the good man knew it; but it was a great thing to get time. The lad, he said to himself, would learn in a short time, if not to forget Hetty, at least to recognise the fact that a pretty, penniless wife was a luxury in which he could not afford to indulge; and every day that came and went, without him and without word of him, would loosen his hold upon her thoughts and affections.

But Miss Lavinia was not inclined to regard matters so hopefully.

“You had put your foot down once,” she observed pithily; “and mark my words, it would have saved a world of trouble if you had kept it there.”

Hetty, in the meantime, was on that visit to the Featherstone family which had been arranged for her.

She suffered from no lack of sympathy at The Hollies; indeed, she got rather too much of it. The girls were eager to hear all about it, and evidently thought the subject quite open to discussion. They had been exposed to no such ordeal themselves, and were honestly of opinion, more than one of them, that such excitement would be distinctly preferable to their own normal state of stagnation. To Hetty's mind this way of regarding matters was infinitely preferable to that adopted by the youngest of the sisters, who insisted upon investing the case with a romantic, if not tragical interest, and foredooming the principals in it to an incurable melancholy.

Indeed, so far did she carry this conception, that Hetty, betrayed into a transient blissful forgetfulness of her cruel circumstances, would find the keen eyes of the youthful Laura fixed upon her with such volumes of reproach in them as filled her with remorse and contrition. To reduce her cousin to this state, and then to surfeit her with caresses and condolences, afforded this young lady a subtle, sensational

enjoyment, of the selfishness of which she had no appreciation.

On the whole, Hetty enjoyed her London visit. To her the novelty of town itself, the shops, the Park, the “lions,” afforded amusement and variety enough. Chris, too, appeared more than once or twice with tickets for this, that, or the other, of which some lucky chance, not clearly specified, had put him in possession; and so the three weeks passed rapidly. Once, at a grand bazaar, at which her ladyship played the part of stall-holder, Hetty had a glimpse of the arbitress of her fate—Lady Fenshire. The girl had come prepared, having seen the name in the long list of patronesses; but it was to see, not to be seen, and when from amongst the idlers round the stall, at which the Marchioness and her daughters were doing a brisk trade in flowers, a former pupil of the vicar's stepped suddenly forward with an animated recognition of her, Hetty would have been thankful had the earth yawned beneath her. It was not so obliging, however, and the great lady, keen of sight and hearing, after the manner of her kind, caught the name, saw the pretty, blushing face, and took in the situation at a glance. That Hetty had come to look at her she knew as well, in that moment, as Hetty herself, and, great lady though she was, the consciousness of the impression likely to be made by her still striking beauty and grace of manner, upon the little country maid who had attracted her son, was not unpleasurable. She had had her own curiosity too, and was not sorry to find it so easily gratified; so a slender, grey-gloved hand was graciously extended to Hetty, and a few kind words, chiefly of enquiry for the vicar, served somewhat to restore the girl's equanimity. It was the work of a moment—meeting, recognition, and all. Even had there been more to say, that was not the time, nor was that the place; but Hetty carried away with her the vision of a tall, stately woman, with sweet eyes and a smile like Cyril's, which was to rise up in her mind and mock her with a vain hope, only too often in the months to come.

By-and-by—and that, too, was a vision she was to call up again in the future—as they were trying to make their way out—Mary Featherstone, and Chris, and she—they were caught up by the youth who had so innocently betrayed them to the Marchioness, having “in tow,” as he would himself have expressed it, a tall, fair girl,

minus any beauty but that of expression, but possessing that in so marked a degree that her face seemed, as they said to each other afterwards, to photograph itself on their memories.

"It has been at the peril of our lives we have got up with you," the young man declared, laughing; "but Lady Margaret vowed she could not let you go without seeing you to speak to, and as I always volunteer for a service of danger, I offered to bring her."

"I did not know you were at the stall until you had moved away from it," Lady Margaret said for herself, "and I thought I would bring you some roses, en souvenir. You will take them, won't you? I have heard of you so often, and I am so very, very glad to have seen you. They came all the way up from Castle Beaumont—the roses, I mean—and I thought you would like to have them."

There was something in her voice, so soft, and caressing, and sympathetic, that Hetty felt the tears spring into her eyes and check her utterance, as she tried to thank her. Perhaps the other saw and comprehended, for she too was a girl, and was, moreover, in her brother's confidence. At any rate, she barely waited to put the flowers in Hetty's hands, to be gone.

"She is a great deal too pale for black," said Mary Featherstone critically, as she glanced after her, "and she must look quite a dowdy near her mother; but she has a nice smile, certainly."

Hetty made no remark. She was engaged in detaching a rose from the bouquet which had been given her, and this presently she held out to Chris.

"There! I share my souvenir with you, Chris!" she said with a smile. "It won't be the first by a great many we have had in common, and some day, perhaps, I shall remind you of it."

"I shall not want reminding," he replied as he put the flower in his buttonhole, and Miss Featherstone, as she looked and listened, felt more than ever the utter futility of cultivating him on her own account; but with what reflections he would one day look back upon the momentary episode, in which he had himself played only the part of a spectator, one had as much idea as the other.

III.

"Only a year ago!" Hetty Carmichael murmured to herself in a weary, incredulous

voice. "Is it possible it is only a year ago!"

Standing as she had stood a twelve-month since, on just such another day, in her father's study, whilst he made known to her the contents of Lady Fenshire's letter and his own wishes, every particular of their conversation, every word, well-nigh every look, came back to her, and filled her heart with a sense of loneliness which passed expression. It was not only that the curtain had fallen for ever on that particular scene in her life-drama, but that the chief actor in it had played his last upon this mortal stage. The good vicar had been ill for many weeks—dead and buried more than a month, yet it seemed to Hetty as though she had never realised it until now. So much had happened, and all that had happened had been so unforeseen and so sad. Cruel as it sounded when it came from the lips of other people—even from those of Aunt Lavinia herself—there could be no denying the fact that Hugh Carmichael, the elder of the vicar's sons, had gone far to break his father's heart. His credit and his commission had indeed been saved, but saved at the cost of what the good man felt was an injustice to his other children, and the burden of that injustice had been more than he could bear.

It was not so much the thought of the younger brother that weighed upon his mind, boys could shift for themselves, but the girl—what was to become of her? Miss Lavinia had barely enough of her own to keep body and soul together, and from Mrs. Featherstone, with her large family and limited means, nothing was to be expected. There was nobody else to look to, and Hetty was not eligible for a situation of any kind, even could her father have borne the idea of it. She was very pretty and charming—qualifications which the mothers of young families are not apt to desire in their daughters' governesses—and she was not accomplished, nor, indeed, could she be said to be clever in any way.

The subject was one which it did not do to think about. He must work harder himself—take more pupils, and try to put more money by. There was the hope, too, that she might marry—not the young lord, but somebody for whom she should be in every respect better fitted. There had been a time when he had smiled at the thought of Chris Fortescue as a possible suitor for her. The young man

was ungainly and homely, and his little girl had such a flower of a face, but now——

"If only you could make her like you as well as you like her, Chris," he said one day with a groan.

Those words, as the girl felt now, looking back, had sealed her fate, for it was the remembrance of them, as they had been repeated to her at the time, which had enabled her to read aright the last yearning look in the vicar's eyes as he lay dying, and had led her to put her hand, in mute obedience to it, in that of her old playmate.

She could not have told you herself at the present moment whether she was sorry or glad that it had so come about. She was fond of Chris—she could not recall the time when she had not been fond of him, and she was very, very grateful to him. What she should have done without him she did not know; but she had neither heart nor inclination to look beyond the present. And that portion of the past, which it was now more than idle to recall, she honestly strove to forget. There had been no second letter in all the twelve months from the lover who had so impetuously refused to take "No" for an answer, and she had never heard of his flying visit to the vicarage.

"Hetty!" Miss Lavinia called suddenly in her sharp, incisive voice, "if you are in the study, I wish you would look and see when the subscription to the infirmary falls due. Ann Gardner has been here about Maggie, and I don't know whether we can do it or not. Your poor father is sure to have entered the last payment in his diary, and I can't help fancying the year is nearly up."

"I will look at once," the girl called back hurriedly; she did not want her aunt's company at that moment, she was not in the mood for either talking or listening; and she took the book, kept still where the vicar had been accustomed to keep it, in the right-hand drawer of his writing-table, and began to examine the entries for the previous June. She found what she wanted with little difficulty; but having found it, she went on reading on her own account. There was little beyond the bare statement of such small events as had marked the first half of the year which had ended so disastrously; but here and there a brief comment—a note of admiration—a phrase peculiar to the writer—touched her to tears. There was such a passage on the 16th of June—a year ago that very day:

"No one could have behaved better than my little girl! God bless her, and make her duty as plain to her and paramount with her always—to her life's end!"

Poor Hetty! It seemed to her as if the tender, solemn words clothed themselves in the dear familiar voice, and rang clearly in her ears. She pressed her lips to the page, and kissed it passionately.

Three days later, there was written this:

"Hetty went up to town to stay with Mary Featherstone. Showed me a letter from C. B., which I have undertaken to answer. Am afraid there is a very strong feeling on both sides. Wish I had never had him here."

"Poor papa!" she murmured with an involuntary smile, a smile that gave place to an expression of utter bewilderment as she read on, for there, in black and white, in her father's own writing, was the record of that interview between him and her lover, of which no mention had ever been made to her.

"I think," the vicar wrote, "I have made a mistake. I should have declared more positively my conviction of the impossibility of his ever being in a position to comply with the conditions imposed upon him. But there is no reasoning with a lad in love. A year hence, they will both be wiser, and, in the meantime, I have his word of honour that he will abstain from writing to her."

The book dropped from Hetty's hand into her lap, and a mist came over her eyes. Whether the faintness that threatened her would have been more than temporary she never knew, for at that moment a tall figure standing in the opening of the French-window interposed itself between her and the light, and a voice, the subdued tones of which could not disguise a certain ring of triumph, exclaimed eagerly:

"At last, Hetty! I have come to claim you, at last."

It was an hour or two later in the afternoon of the same day, when Chris Fortescue rose to take his leave of the urbane head of a certain well-known and highly respected firm of City solicitors.

"I am afraid," he said, "I have given you needless trouble and plied you with a good many questions, but to a man in my position it is hard to realise——"

"That he has come into a fortune of eighty thousand pounds, which, failing his

existence, would have been swept into the coffers of the State? My dear sir, you will not only learn to realise it yourself, but you will find other people uncommonly apt at helping you to do so. The whole thing lay in a nutshell. There was not a flaw in the title from the first. All we had to do for you, all you had to do for yourself, was to prove your identity."

Chris walked away from the office, like a man in a dream. He had a vague idea that he had committed his affairs and the management of everything belonging to him henceforth for ever, to the smiling, elderly gentleman who had just wished him good-morning, and that everybody who brushed against him in the street must see that something had happened to him; but, with this exception, his mind was in a state of chaos.

As a rule, he was clear-headed enough, but the suddenness with which his good fortune had come to him had fairly dazzled him. Why, it was little more than a week since Cooper chanced upon the advertisement for him, and brought it down to Mark Lane, and he had promised to "treat them all round," if anything should come of it.

Eighty thousand pounds—that was to say, more thousands a year than he had ever, as yet, had hundreds. It was not the mere bare fact of the money he was trying to grasp, but all it meant—all it would enable him to do and get, not for himself—it was not the way with Chris to think of himself—but for Hetty!

He was walking, he did not know whither, or with what precise purpose; but when, after a time, he came out of dreamland, and began to collect his senses, he remembered that it was Saturday, and that he was expected at the vicarage. He hailed the first omnibus he saw going the way of his lodgings—he had not yet so taken in the new state of things as to disport himself in a hansom—crammed the few things he had need of into his bag, and managed, he scarcely knew how, to save his train. How many times, he wondered, had he "done" those sixty miles to and fro, in the course of the last year?

There was nobody whom he knew, excepting always its very limited railway staff, at the little station, and nobody in the village, save the children who, newly let out of school, broke with their shrill voices the otherwise perfect calm of the afternoon. There had been sunshine in town, in the City streets, all the way

down, through the beautiful smiling country; but the young man could not have told you whether the sun shone or not. His mind had been too full—aye, and his heart too; but now, suddenly, the golden glow in which things lay without no less than within him seemed to be borne in upon his consciousness. It was as though the world were transfigured to him. Happy, thrice happy Chris! to whom in so short a space so much had been given—love, wealth, and all the power for good that wealth bears in its bosom!

The vicarage lay, like all else around and about it, in the sunshine; yet, as he came within sight of it, the glad look that had come into his eyes died out of them, and the eager steps slackened their speed.

It was not that there was any sign of mourning about the house, or that in its present quietude there was anything unnatural; it was simply that as his gaze fell upon it, the past, making itself heard in his heart, rebuked the joy of the present.

"We were not sure whether we were to expect you," Miss Lavinia said, standing in the porch to receive him; "and Hetty has a headache, and has gone to lie down. Come in out of the sun, and have something to cool you. It is no good offering you tea, to make matters worse."

"Why, do I look so warm? I don't feel the heat anything out of the way," Chris protested. "And I should like a cup of tea above all things; but what about Hetty? It is nothing more than a headache, is it, Miss Lavinia? I could have sworn she had never had a headache in her life."

"My dear Chris! have you lived to your time of life, without discovering that when a woman is out of sorts, or out of temper—no matter which—she invariably takes refuge in a headache?"

Chris laughed.

"The exception proves the rule," he said, "and Hetty is the exception. Besides, what should put her out? You are not given to quarrelling, you two!"

Miss Lavinia glanced at him sharply.

"She will be down directly, to speak for herself," she replied shortly. "And if you take my advice, you will not take too much notice of any nonsense she may talk. She is out of sorts, as I said just now, and the least thing upsets her. Now, it was most unfortunate to-day. If I could have foreseen what would happen, there should have been no slipping into the house by the back way, I can assure you."

And so, before Hetty put in an appearance at all, so much of the awkwardness she dreaded was spared her, that the fact of the visit which had been paid her in the morning, was made known to her betrothed.

"He had no right to come," Miss Lavinia wound up angrily. "Besides, if he was to come at all, he should have walked up to the hall-door like a man, not slunk round to the study window to take her by surprise, and work upon her feelings before anyone knew he was within miles of her!"

"How could he have got to the front without passing the study, when he had walked from Heatherleigh? You would not have had him make the tour of the village first? He came by the twelve o'clock train, which does not stop at the station here, you know, Chris, and so he came across the fields, and when he saw me—was it not very natural?"

She had come in upon their conversation so suddenly that her aunt was taken by surprise and silenced; but Chris answered quietly, as he kissed her:

"It was quite natural, Hetty. Anybody who had ever lived here would have done the same. But I am sorry he came at all, dear. I think, after all that had happened, he should have stayed away. I don't say but that it may have been a great temptation to come," he added with some compunction, as he mentally put himself in the other's place.

"After all that has happened!" Hetty repeated, ignoring the latter half of the sentence, as though it had not been uttered. "What do you know of all that had happened? Just as much as I did, and no more. I am not going to make any complaints, Aunt Lavinia," she added, glancing round, but her aunt was already disappearing through the doorway, and a little sigh of relief escaped Hetty as she saw it. "It was papa's doing, you know, Chris, and he never did anything in his life but for the best. I should no more think of blaming papa—" she could not finish the sentence, and presently she began again: "It was done for the best, but it was a little hard upon us. It was hard upon him my not knowing, and hard upon me not to know."

"Not to know what, Hetty? You forget you are talking in riddles," Chris interposed.

"Your father made a mistake," he said, when she had explained. "It was just the sort of mistake I can fancy him

making. He was too soft-hearted to refuse hope, even when he had not it to give. And, Hetty, there was no real hope ever. You know that, yourself?"

"One never knows what may happen," she answered with a flush. "Nobody would have supposed a year ago that he could have helped himself in any way in so short a time—and he has. He told papa he would leave no stone unturned, and he has made friends and made interest. He has been promised an appointment which would add to his income, and he means to throw up his commission and take it—that is to say, he did mean to. Now, I don't know what he will do."

She spoke very quietly, with none of the pretty, childish petulance which to some people, Chris amongst the number, constituted one of her charms. She was very pale too, and looked all the paler for the contrast afforded by her black dress, and he could see she had been crying. That none of the ordinary forms of salutation had been gone through between them, he was, for the moment, as forgetful as herself. One is scarcely likely to remember certain conventional phrases, when one finds oneself suddenly stretched upon the rack.

"Was that what he came to say to you?" he asked after a pause. "How was it he waited until your father was dead? Surely he must have known something of it a month ago; surely——"

"He knew nothing of it until within the last week, and he never heard about—what had happened here, until somebody asked him what had been the matter yesterday. He was with his regiment in Ireland, where nobody knew us by name even, and he never saw it in the paper. He was coming to papa; when papa was not here, who was there to come to but me, and how was he to tell that it was no good—that it was too late?"

"He was coming to your father, with his mother's consent? Is that so, Hetty?"

"What does it matter how he was coming?" Hetty cried out in sudden anger. "He has come, and gone! Is not that enough for you?" In another minute, however, the little hand was laid upon his arm, with a pitiful appeal for pardon. "I don't mean to be unkind to you, Chris—I don't indeed—only——"

"Only what, Hetty? It is a very big 'only,' I am afraid," Chris observed with involuntary bitterness. "You may as well tell me the truth," he added, as she remained silent. "He had not his mother's

consent, had he? And he thought, now you were your own mistress, you would take him without it?"

"He thought, if papa consented, Lady Fenshire would not hold out."

"And when he knew there was no question of your father, he saw no harm in persuading you to ignore your father's wishes! Was that the right thing for any gentleman to do? You know it was not," pleaded the young man.

"I know you are very hard upon him. It is not like you to be so hard, Chris, and it is not worth while. You have everything your own way, and you might have some feeling for other people. There might have been a chance, if papa had lived. I might have induced him to let me off my promise—but now," with a sudden little sob, "I never can. If Cyril had come to me to-day, twice as well off, twice as sure of himself and his position as he did come, I should have been bound by it just the same. I——"

"But if I did not choose you to be bound by it, Hetty?" Chris interposed in a strange, tuneless voice.

"You?" the girl replied. "How could you help it? It is not the promise to you, Chris. I was not thinking of that," and her face flushed up—"not at that moment. It was that other promise, that I would never, never let it be said by any one that George Carmichael had taken advantage of his old friendship with Lady Fenshire to palm off his penniless daughter upon her son. I might have guessed from his making me give it that he did not think it was all so entirely at an end; but I thought of nothing then but him!"

"And that was the answer you gave to-day? Did you tell him nothing else, Hetty? Did not you tell him we were engaged?"

There was a dead silence for a moment, as Chris stood looking at her, waiting for her answer. Then she burst into tears.

"I couldn't, Chris," she cried pitifully; "I couldn't."

The young man turned abruptly away from her, and walking to the open window, stood there for some minutes without speaking. He could not have analysed his own feelings any more than he could

have analysed Hetty's, and he could not think. There was only one thing plain to him—it was all over between them. Her heart was not his; and after all, it was not he who had come first, and the other had been true to her. So much he felt even in his anguish. And he—was he to repay all her father's goodness to him by spoiling her life? Was that the purpose to be served by his newly-won wealth?

"Hetty," he said, going back to her, where she still stood quietly crying, "I came down here to-day, with news of my own. A man, who did my father a great injustice, and who afterwards amassed much wealth through the doing of it, died the other day, childless and remorseful, and has left his fortune to me. I had been thinking, dear, ever since I knew of it, how happy it would enable me to make you, in my own way; but I understand now that that can never be—that it must be in your way, and that that is quite different. You told me once that you hated money, and I told you then that were I a rich man, I would make you love it. You may dry your eyes, Hetty. I am a rich man to-day, and I have not forgotten!"

It is nearly five years since the vicar's daughter, taking with her a dowry of twenty thousand pounds, was made welcome at Castle Beaumont. She is seen little in English society, for her husband's duties, in connection with a certain large house of business, already well known in the City as "Fortescue's," keep them much abroad; but, go where she will, her sweet face and sunny temper make friends for her.

As for Chris, he has reaped from the hard work in which he at first sought solace and distraction, golden fruits; but the best gift the years have given him is his wife; and nobody who has heard Lady Margaret Fortescue remind her husband of the withered rose which, gathered by herself on the day of their first meeting, was so long treasured by him for the sake of somebody else, and has watched the look in his eyes as he listened, can doubt that the happiness he once thought he had surrendered for ever, has been granted him at last.

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